

Stanislaw Chojnacki

Ethiopian Crosses

A Cultural History and Chronology

in collaboration with Carolyn Gossage

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Table of Contents

6	Foreword <i>Massimiliano Mondelli</i>
9	Introduction
17	Nomenclature and Classification of Crosses and Related Historical Objects
37	The Veneration of the Cross in Ethiopia
67	Materials and Methods Used for the Production of Crosses
79	The Cross and its Symbolic Significance
91	The Chronology of Ethiopian Crosses
93	Part I: Crosses of the Aksumite Period
102	Part II: Late-Aksumite Period, 8 th - to 11 th -Century Crosses
106	Part III: Zag'we Dynasty, 11 th - to 13 th -Century Crosses
119	Part IV: 14 th -, 15 th - and Early 16 th -Century Crosses
143	Part V: Late 16 th - and 17 th -Century Crosses
150	Part VI: 18 th -Century Crosses
159	Part VII: 19 th - and 20 th -Century Crosses
177	Bibliography
187	Index

Ethiopian art – with its links to Byzantine, Islamic and sub-Saharan civilisations – unquestionably represents one of the most powerful expressions of African culture's bountiful treasures.

Through the passage of time, Ethiopia has been the focal point of numerous external influences from the Mediterranean, from the African interior, from the Arabic peninsula and from the Indian Ocean. This age-old convergence of profoundly diverse cultures is, in fact, integral to the unique cultural heritage that is reflected in Ethiopia's historic past.

The rich material presented by Professor Stanislaw Chojnacki in this scholarly work is the product of an in-depth analysis of a vast collection of Ethiopian crosses found both within the borders of Ethiopia and – increasingly – in museums around the world. These crosses have been examined by the author with the same conviction and the same wonder as Pliny the Elder, who proclaimed in admiration “ex Africa semper aliquid novi”.

In essence, Ethiopian Crosses, like its predecessor, Ethiopian Icons, represents a highly significant contribution to the field of Ethiopian Studies and is the result of more than thirty years of research. We are personally grateful to Professor Chojnacki, not only for having involved the Foundation in bringing to fruition

this important body of work, but most of all for the deep bond of friendship which precipitated our participation in both these endeavours.

In incorporating the expression of Professor Chojnacki's findings into the text, the committed collaboration of Mrs Carolyn Gossage – to whom we express our heartfelt thanks, admiration and friendship – has been of inestimable value. The Fondation Carlo Leone et Mariena Montandon is both proud and honoured to contribute to the dissemination of a work of such relevance – a true milestone in the study of the art and culture of Ethiopia. As my late mother, Mariena Mondelli Montandon – the irreplaceable driving force of the Fondation – maintained with great conviction, “The enjoyment of beauty brings always and only happiness”. We are hopeful not only that Ethiopian Crosses. A Cultural History and Chronology will be a fitting revelation of this treasured aspect of Ethiopian heritage, but that it will also be regarded as a thing of beauty in its own right.

Massimiliano Mondelli

Fondation Carlo Leone et Mariena Montandon

Introduction

My interest in Ethiopian crosses first blossomed while I was engaged in acquiring artifacts for a small museum at the University College of Addis Abäba over fifty years ago. Later, in the course of a systematic process of collecting objects of interest for the Museum of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Abäba in the 1960s and 1970s, my initial enthusiasm for these crosses evolved into an intense fascination. During the following decades, from these relatively uncomplicated beginnings, my involvement developed into an in-depth research project which was combined with my major interest in Ethiopian religious paintings. As a result, both these projects became the focus of my activities during my numerous field trips to Ethiopia's countryside in the last decade of the 20th century and into the early years of the new millenium. This book, therefore, is the outcome of these combined attractions.

Initially it was necessary for a survey to be made of written records related to Ethiopian crosses which were available in foreign sources, but, as well, by according special emphasis on seeking out local sources within Ethiopia itself. Within this context, some important aspects of crosses have emerged, in particular with respect to their nomenclature and veneration by Ethiopians as well as the symbolic meanings which they have acquired over time. While most of the non-native authors have described Ethiopian crosses from their own perspectives, in this book the main intent is to focus primarily on the indigenous point of view. It should be mentioned, however, that the fact that an Ethiopian writes about crosses does not necessarily mean that it has been written entirely from an indigenous perspective, since his or her conclusions might be largely based on what foreigners have already written regarding Ethiopian crosses.

Due attention is also given to the published catalogues of collections of Ethiopian crosses in various museums throughout the world, and, in particular to the invaluable Catalogue of Ethiopian Processional Crosses compiled by Eine Moore, which was published in 1971. Hers was the first comprehensive attempt to examine and classify the nomenclature and typology as well as the chronology of Ethiopian crosses and the catalogue has retained its useful validity to this day. In addition, sections on crosses in exhibition catalogues and general information found in books on

Ethiopia have also had some bearing on our knowledge of Ethiopian crosses. Although generally the kinds of metals used for the manufacture of crosses is evident, the analysis of various alloys would support or correct the data already obtained by other methods employed for the dating of crosses.

Turning to chronology, a combination of three different methods of inquiry has been applied in order to render the dating of crosses as accurate as possible and provide a reasonably sound basis for establishing these dates. Given that the vast majority of crosses do not bear a written indication of their dates of origin, it was necessary to adopt three separate courses of action for further investigation.

To begin with, the few crosses which do bear inscriptions indicating their date of origin became the central points of reference for creating a chronological framework into which the undated crosses could be assigned. An analogy factor, however, is supported by linking the crosses with their depictions in firmly dated miniatures, icons and wall paintings. This method of investigation rests upon the assumption that the artists depicted crosses as they observed them in their actual surroundings.

Thirdly, circumstantial evidence for the dating of particular crosses was also used and whenever it is supported by the results of other methods the range of dating thus obtained is broad, but can be considered as relatively accurate. It should be emphasised, nevertheless, that in the above complex process of investigation, in singular cases the results do require further confirmation and there is still plenty of room for diversity of approach. An imaginative attempt at Ethiopian cross morphology undertaken by Dr Mario Di Salvo is an example of this.

It must also be mentioned that this book could not have been published without the generous support of the Carlo Leone Montandon Foundation in Switzerland, whose foundress, the late Mrs Mariena Mondelli, had initially inspired the author to write about crosses and had cherished the project from the outset.

In the course of my research, many friends have generously extended their blessing, encouragement and help in various ways.

I am particularly grateful to His Grace *Abunä* Mathias, Archbishop of the Ethiopian community in Toronto, and to Mon-

signore Osvaldo Raineri of Rome, Italy, to Dr Veronika Six of Hamburg and Dr Witold Witakowski of Uppsala, along with Professor Shiferaw Bekele of Addis Abāba for their help in the arduous task of the reading and transliteration of inscriptions on crosses. In addition, special thanks are addressed to H.E. Mons. Silvano Tomasi, c.s., Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See in Geneva for his benevolent support in making contacts on my behalf. I am much indebted to Professor Michael Gervers of the University of Toronto for his help in solving problems related to the scanning of reproductions, to Dr Retta Alemayehu, also residing in Toronto, for his help in solving certain logistical problems, along with *Kännazmač* Tilahun Paulos and *Ato* Tilaye Gebremedhin of Addis Abāba, who most kindly provided important answers to my questions on liturgy and social customs related to the Cross. I am equally grateful to Mrs Helene Moussa of Toronto and Don Enzo Lucchesi of Geneva for their valuable help in searching for Coptic documents. The translations from German sources which were so generously furnished by Wendy Wright of Toronto were also much appreciated, as was the technical assistance of my personal computer guru, Mr Ron Slater of Sudbury, who has come to my rescue on occasions too numerous to mention.

To my long-time friend, Mr Paul Henze, I extend heartfelt thanks for his never-ending enthusiasm and companionship during the strenuous field trips we undertook together in Ethiopia and for his generous permission for the use of his photographs for this publication. Special mention should be also made of *Ato* Moḥammad Denboba, our faithful driver and friend, for his great help during the process of photographing countless objects during our travels. My greatest personal obligation, however, has been to my friends, Dr Mario Di Salvo and Dr Massimiliano Mondelli for their invaluable help and understanding during the complex process of transatlantic publication and printing. Last but by no means least I am especially grateful to Mrs Carolyn Gossage of Toronto for her extremely dedicated and always efficient collaboration in the preparation of the text.

Ethiopian Crosses A Cultural History and Chronology

Nomenclature and Classification of Crosses and Related Historical Objects

Although travellers and collectors have recognised the wealth of form and artistic quality of Ethiopian crosses for many years, a systematic study of them is still in the early stages of development.

The first attempt at classification occurred in 1913 with the publication of the proceedings of the German Aksum Expedition which included numerous illustrations of crosses. The authors classified their findings into two basic categories: neck crosses and hand crosses. The latter category, in turn, was divided into two further sub-groups, namely the small hand crosses for daily use by the priests and monks, and the large processional hand crosses (DAE 1913: 94–95, 104–105). Another specifically identified group was that of the larger crosses affixed to a shaft and designated as processional crosses (DAE 1913: III, 100, 105–106; DAE 1913: Tafel 10–11). Crosses appearing on the top of churches were referred to as “crowns” (DAE 1913: 13–16).

It was not until the 1960s that Ethiopian crosses became the subject of re-classification. Pierre Petrides, a resident of Addis Abäba and an avid amateur collector of Ethiopian crosses, while displaying his collection to a group of fellow collectors, introduced his own designations. He divided the crosses into pendant or neck crosses “mostly worn by men and children”, pectoral crosses “mostly worn by women”, and “pastoral crosses”, the latter also variously known as hand, priest, sanctification or blessing crosses. The large processional, ceremonial or “banner” crosses were placed in a separate category as were the architectural crosses “found on the top of ecclesiastical buildings” (Petrides 1969: 65–77, 252–253, figs. 105–126).

This bewildering multiplicity of designations combined with occasionally inaccurate explanations regarding the use of crosses had some impact on further attempts at their categorisation and also created certain difficulties. To further complicate matters, Petrides ventured into a frustrating and, at times, futile explanation of the symbolic significance of each part of the cross. In 1949, the British traveller David Buxton presented his own classification of

crosses which he had divided into three distinct groups: pectoral, priests' and processional crosses (Buxton 1949: 51–52). In 1970, he further developed his classification, dividing the priests' crosses according to size and material, and these divisions became two sub-groups. The first sub-group included metal crosses which were from 17 to 30 cm long, while the second sub-group included wooden crosses from 24 to 47 cm long (Buxton 1970: 252–253).

In her 1971 catalogue of processional crosses, Eine Moore compiled her own classification based on three specific criteria: the method of production, the material used, and the emergent form they took on (Moore 1971: 11–80). In her 1973 general survey of crosses, she divided them into three classes which included processional crosses with "a hollow shaft for mounting on a wooden handle", hand crosses which "have, instead of a shaft, a narrow solid handle ending in a base plate or cube" and neck crosses which are "suspended round the neck and have a small ring attached to their top". Moore includes her valuable observations on the methods of the production of neck crosses in particular (Moore 1973: 69–87).

The next attempt at classification was that of Waclaw Korabiewicz, a Polish collector, who published a richly illustrated catalogue providing a valuable record of the Ethiopian crosses found in private and public collections. Korabiewicz theorised about the origin of Ethiopian crosses, their earliest forms and names (Korabiewicz 1973: 7–8). He classified them into four categories: "manual-processional" designated also as "processional-manual", manual, processional and pectoral. A separate group consisting of the "so-called apex or architectural crosses" found on the tops of Ethiopian churches was singled out as a feature belonging exclusively to the churches. Although this is generally accurate, in some parts of Təgray, particularly in Tāmben, the rooftops of many farmers' houses are decorated with crosses.

The 1990s and the early years of the new millenium brought further attempts towards classification and still more confusion in terminology. One such effort is the catalogue of hand crosses of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies Collection written by Dorcas Hecht in collaboration with Brigitta Benzing and Girma Kidane (Gərma Kidanä). Regrettably, it includes only part of the Institute's large collection and the quality of the reproductions is disappoint-

ing (Hecht 1990). Hecht borrowed information from Petrides, Buxton and Korabiewicz and, in turn, classified crosses into ten groups according to their form, material and use.

She first divided the crosses into processional and hand crosses and then sub-divided the latter category by relative size. Small hand crosses are the property of individual priests. Hecht, however, does not specify the use of the large hand crosses. These categories are followed by the crosses designated as pectoral "mostly worn by women" on a long chain. They are often comparatively large and have a hinge.

Hecht recorded a fashion which developed among 20th-century female foreigners in residence in Addis Abāba of wearing old silver crosses which they had purchased from antique shops. These were worn purely as ornamentation. Hecht, however, took this particular predilection as a general condition. The neck crosses are described as smaller than pectoral and "worn mostly by children and men". Hecht also borrowed from Korabiewicz the term "apex crosses" and from Petrides the name "architectural" to designate the crosses affixed to the tops of churches. She also created a new category which she named "staff crosses . . . mostly made of iron" which "pilgrims carry . . . on their shoulders". This particular description is, however, inaccurate since today such staffs are mostly carried by hermits.

The last three categories listed by Hecht refer to crosses used for ornamentation in architecture, embroidery, tattoos and in manuscripts and scrolls. Hecht also dealt with the material used and the manufacture of crosses; however, her descriptions were largely based on Moore's findings (Hecht 1990: 6–8). In writing about wooden crosses, she presupposes the existence of "carving centres – "probably run by monks and priests in monasteries and churches" which "may have produced fine examples of the craft, while a number of crosses may have been carved by individual priests who had little or no skill at all" (Hecht 1990: 9). This negative evaluation of the crosses produced by simple clergy is definitely at odds with the perceptions of Korabiewicz, who came much closer to the truth when he emphasised the beauty of these hand-carved crosses and named them the "inspiration of Ethiopian folklore" (Korabiewicz 1973: 7).

In his book of general information on Ethiopia's early history, the French scholar, Francis Anfray, specifically mentions the "liturgical crosses attached to a long staff", but in captions accompanying the illustrations, they are referred to as "processional crosses". In his description of the category referred to as manual crosses, he notes that "the priests are never separated from their crosses". A third category was comprised of the crosses which the faithful wear "attached on the neck by a cord, but in the past, they used to make an image of the cross in the form of a tattoo on the forehead". The fourth category refers to "church crosses". Anfray gives as an example a painted wooden cross over three metres long which is kept on one of the island churches of Lake Tana (Anfray 1990: 208–213).

In concluding this examination of the various attempts at cross classification which have been made to date, attention should also be drawn to the recent efforts of another French scholar, Jacques Mercier, who is the author of several exhibition catalogues. Essentially, he follows the conventional terminology – pectoral, hand and processional crosses – but on one occasion he also makes cursory reference to the "long-staffed crosses of the monks, the short benediction crosses owned by clergymen, and the long benediction crosses used for religious ceremonies" (Mercier 2000: 77). Along with the various schemes of cross classification by type, scholars also began to designate them according to style. In 1969, Petrides already ventured to suggest that there were three main styles and provided the following relevant dates for each: the Lalibäla cross, 950–1250, the Gondär cross, 1600–1800, and after 1800 the post-Aksumite cross (Petrides 1969: 73–74). Although both the dating and terminology were debatable, by the early 1970s, they had become relatively commonplace among the Addis Abäba collectors, antique dealers and scholars. The term "Gondärene", however, was also applied to 17th- and 18th-century Ethiopian paintings and essentially there were no objections to this designation.

In the case of the term "Lalibäla" cross, however, certain problems arose. Petrides used this designation for various forms of crosses which were found in the historic province of Lasta and named after the late 12th-early 13th-century ruler of the Zag'we dy-

nasty, who is believed to have built eleven monolithic churches there. Petrides also designated crosses – "typical Lalibäla of Zag'we type" – which were of a particular form and which later became generally known as crosses in the "Lalibäla" style.

The process of the naming of these crosses first began in 1958 with the publication of a book on the Lalibäla churches including reproductions of two prayer staffs, one adorned with a cross at the top, a large processional cross, and a stool. According to the information obtained by the author of the book, all these objects had apparently been used by the renowned king, Lalibäla (Bidder 1958: fig. 22). The priests at Lalibäla, however, were not in the least concerned with either the form or the style of the above cross, but were especially impressed with the fact that it had been used by a ruler considered to be a saint of the Ethiopian Church and the cross was therefore a sacred object. Thus "the cross of Lalibäla" – according to the priests' interpretation – became "the Lalibäla style cross" in the opinion of Addis Abäba connoisseurs and a commonplace term among the antique merchants and silver-smiths.

In her 1971 catalogue of processional crosses, Eine Moore did not designate the bronze crosses in the IES collection as "Lalibäla style" although they are similar to the above mentioned holy cross (1971: 16–19). The French scholar, Claude Lepage, proved to be less reticent and in 1975, he published information on a cross, which he found in Maryam Dəngəlat in Agame, Təgray, and designated it "of the Lalibäla type" (1975: 23). Jacques Mercier, on the other hand, drew attention to the fact that crosses similar to the holy cross of Lalibäla existed in churches in other provinces such as the one presently kept in the Museum at Mäqäle, Təgray, which had long been in the possession of Dima Giyorgis Church in Eastern Goğgam (Mercier 2000: 70–71). This word of caution did not prevent the American scholar, C. Griffith Mann, from naming Lasta as the place of origin of two crosses which are similar to the holy cross in Lalibäla and presently are in the possession of the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland (Mann 2001: 76–79). They are, however, of uncertain origin because of having passed through the hands of Addis Abäba antiquarian dealers.

In fact, all so-called Lalibäla crosses are not only undated but

also the place of their production is unknown. For centuries, several such crosses have been kept in certain churches and monasteries throughout Northern and Central Ethiopia and the name "Lalibäla cross" was totally unknown to the priests and monks in these places. That the term "Lalibäla style" was invented by foreigners seems indisputable, but eventually the Ethiopians adopted it as their own.

A similar case arises with the name "Hawaria" given by Korabiewicz to a certain type of hand cross consisting of a Greek cross enclosed within a circle (Korabiewicz 1973: 2, figs. 3–12, 24). He created the name by using the Amharic word – *hawarya*, meaning Apostle. According to him, this form of cross originating from the "Coptic circular emblem" reached Ethiopia in the early 4th century. Frumentius, known in Ethiopia as *Abba Sälama* or Father of Peace, and the person responsible for Ethiopia's conversion to Christianity, is said to have brought the hand cross from Egypt, where he had received it as a gift from St Pachomius, the founder of Coptic monasticism. In 322, Pachomius instructed the monks to embroider on their hoods the symbolic cruciform sign which was eventually duplicated in the form of hand crosses. Korabiewicz claims to have found in Ethiopia one 6th-century original Coptic/Egyptian ebony hand cross of the "Hawaria style", which convinced him that the Ethiopian Hawaria crosses were of Coptic origin (Korabiewicz 1973: fig. 25). There is, however, some discrepancy between Korabiewicz's assertions and the entry in Kane's Amharic Dictionary which reads: "*hawarya mäsqäl*: a plain cross without any additions; neck cross about 3 in. long (B)" (Kane 1990: 1506).

This early Coptic/Egyptian cross as well as Salama's cross from Korabiewicz's description do not seem to have had any influence on the form of hand crosses in Northern Ethiopia, where the type of cross and the name "Hawaria" seem to be completely unknown. On the other hand, all examples of Hawaria crosses collected by Korabiewicz originate from Central and Southern Ethiopia and this might be the case with the similar crosses in other collections. The name "Hawaria" quickly gained recognition and is extensively used in Hecht's Catalogue of Hand Crosses in the IES Collection (1989: 118–119; 1990: 48, 99, 113, 119, 136,

146, 148, 166, 178). Korabiewicz's interpretation – "Tree of Paradise" for the cross showing "Adam carrying a tree on his head" (Korabiewicz 1973: fig. 21) – also found its way into Hecht's catalogue, but she changed the name to the "Tree of Life" (1989: 18–19; 1990: fig. 42). The type of cross strongly reminiscent of a spear was christened "Longinos" by the inventive Polish collector after the name of the soldier who pierced Christ's side at the Crucifixion (Korabiewicz 1973: figs. 40, 62).

Heinz Skrobucha compiled a survey of Ethiopian crosses which was the first of its kind in Germany. He drew heavily from Eine Moore's and other contemporary writing in the field. The book includes a map showing the geographical distribution of various forms of crosses, which the author himself considers as very tentative (Skrobucha 1983). Skrobucha's remarkable restraint in giving symbolic significance to particular parts of the cross is in marked contrast to the imaginatively exaggerated approach taken by other scholars in this regard.

Finally, there is Bent Juel-Jensen's proposal to designate Aksumite crosses as specifically "Ethiopian" (Juel-Jensen 1990: 1–4). This distinguished numismatic collector naturally focussed his attention on the earliest examples of crosses on coins. In fact, many Aksumite crosses are of the *patée* type set in a circle and thus strongly reminiscent of Coptic crosses. They often have a central indentation filled with gold – the meaning of which is under discussion, but a symbolic interpretation appears to be the most widely accepted (Munro-Hay 1989: 221).

The four scholars who initially described Ethiopian crosses, Petrides, Buxton, Moore and Hecht, each developed a particular system of classification and gave various names to the same type of cross. The general weakness, however, of all these attempts at classification is the fact that they are based on only superficially observed occurrences in Ethiopian life – particularly its religious and liturgical aspects. In addition, foreign names have been arbitrarily applied to crosses without any reference to Ethiopian tradition. It might, therefore, be useful to list and explain the names which Ethiopians give to various kinds of crosses and their parts and relate these names to the occasions when they are used. This would help to elucidate certain indigenous Ethiopian concepts in

respect to crosses, which appear to be in contrast with the concepts on which the foreign scholars' attempts at cross classification are based.

A rare opportunity to study Ethiopian crosses and their names presented itself in 1955 on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the coronation of Emperor *Aṣe Ḥaylā Šəllase*, when an exhibition of historical objects was organised in Gondär. The objects were brought from various churches and monasteries in the Bägemdär and Lake Ṭana area and were labelled for display at the castle of *Aṣe Fasilädäs*, 1632–1667. The text referring to each object was written according to the wording and information provided by the priests who brought them. The main information written in Amharic included the name of the object, details of ownership and date of origin. Some information was also provided about the materials from which the object was made. Because it was expected that the exhibition would also be visited by foreign guests and tourists, English sub-titles were added. The person who undertook this task, did not, however, always translate precisely from the original Amharic text, probably because he did not agree with the information in the Amharic version of the label.

It is indeed fortunate that Franz Graf von Magnis, a German journalist who was on assignment in Gondär at that time, made a black and white photographic record of the exhibition, and although they are not perfect reproductions, these photographs nonetheless represent an important documentation in terms of tracing Ethiopia's historic treasures. Most of the labels are legible, especially the Amharic text, and serve well as potential research material. On his departure from Ethiopia a few years after this event, Graf von Magnis left the album of photographs in my care.

The following concerns only one aspect of the labels composed for the exhibition, namely the use of Amharic words for the crosses and related objects. The labelling, in fact, created a problem with regard to accuracy. The priests had provided the names as they knew them and had possibly even checked them with Church scholars. They were using the Gondär form of Amharic which the citizens of Gondär consider classical. Within this context, the names of the particular kinds of crosses can thus be regarded as authoritative.

At the exhibition, out of seven hand crosses, the term *yä'əḡḡ mäsqäl* was used only twice and for the remaining five only the material from which they were made was indicated. Three of the crosses had no identifying labels, however the remaining twenty-two crosses were designated as processional crosses in the English sub-titles, while in the Amharic version, eight crosses bear the name [*yä*] *mäṣor mäsqäl* or "cross to [carry] on a pole", the term *mäṣor* meaning also a wooden handle (Walker 1933: 102). In one instance, a processional cross is designated *qum mäsqäl* or "standing cross".

In most labels, the material used was also indicated. One cross was said to have been made entirely of gold and several were described as gold-plated, while in the English version of these particular labels the term "silver gilt" was used. Other crosses were made of either copper or brass and one of wood or *ənčät*.

In four instances, indications of ownership were provided. One brass cross A.D. 1404 [sic] belonged to *Aṣe Yəṣhaq*, 1413–1430, the second, a copper cross dated A.D. 1633, belonged to *Štege Häməlmal Wärq*, the mother of *Aṣe Susnəyos*, 1607–1632, the third cross dated A.D. 1633 was silver and belonged to Gondär's founder [*Aṣe*] *Fasil* or *Fasilädäs*, and the ownership of the fourth, a gold-plated cross dated A.D. 1853, was attributed to a certain *aggafari* or chamberlain *Şəge*.

The Silver Jubilee exhibition also revealed the existence of long staffs topped with a cross, all made in one piece. Most seem to have been cast from iron which was indicated in one label and another was identified as silver. It is possible, however, that some were also cast in bronze. Usually they were ornamented with knobs, from five to eleven which were reminiscent of the ringed joints of bamboo stems and most were pointed at the lower end. Furthermore, the crosses at the top ranged from simple to rather elaborate. In all probability, they were pastoral staffs, although their designations in the labels are confusing and suggest that the details regarding their names and their use had been lost for a very long time, possibly even for centuries. Out of five staffs surmounted with crosses at the exhibition, three were designated *mäqq"amiya* or prayer staff, one [*yä*] *mäqq"amiya mäsqäl* or cross [of the] prayer staff and one simply as *mäsqäl* or cross. Further-

more two prayer staffs or crutches at the exhibition are correctly designated *mäqq'amiya*. It follows that the person responsible for the labels at the 1955 Gondär exhibition did not differentiate between *mäqq'amiya* or prayer staff with a short horizontal bar at the top, which, in the Ethiopian context, means a crutch used to lean upon during the long hours of the service, and the pastoral staffs which are always topped with crosses. That person clearly favoured the expression *mäqq'amiya* and did not use a specific word for pastoral staffs.

As revealed by the labels, these prayer staffs belonged to the great figures of the Aksumite period in Ethiopian history. One staff, which is dated A.D. 331, was apparently used by *Abba Sälama*, Apostle of Ethiopia. The second, dated to A.D. 523, is attributed to St Yaräd, inventor of Ethiopian musical notation. The third staff, also dated A.D. 523, belonged to *Abunä Arägawi* or *Zä-Mika'el*, founder of the monastery of Däbrä Damo. The fourth staff was of similar vintage and belonged to the well-known 6th-century Ethiopian ruler Gäbrä Mäsqäl. Without question, this display of great names and very early dates conveyed the impression of the great – but not fully proven – antiquity of the objects on view. Since the Gondär exhibition, enquiries and observations have been advanced during the last fifty years, thereby furthering our knowledge of crosses. However, the in-depth study of peoples' attitude towards their use and names began only recently. A noted Ethiopian scholar, Dr Getatchew Haile, when asked about this matter replied, "I simply call them (a) *yangät mäsqäl*, (b) *yä'əgğ mäsqäl*, (c) *yäburake mäsqäl*" (personal communication of 21 February 1991). The (a) category represents neck crosses or literally "cross of the neck", (b) is used for hand crosses and (c) blessing crosses, which is the current expression as well as correctly reflecting the major use of such crosses.

In his book on Aksum heritage, Muluwärq Kidanä Maryam, a traditional Church scholar at Mäqälä, uses the expression *qäqwami mäsqäl*, meaning "standing cross" for processional crosses and *yä'əgğ* for hand crosses, but gives little information on their use. On the other hand, he is keenly interested in the kinds of metals that were used, in particular the quantity of gold and includes a detailed list of its content in each illustrated cross (Mu-

luwärq Kidanä Maryam 2003: 51–58). Also similarly to those involved in the Gondär exhibition many years earlier, his concern is centred on the important people who happened to use the crosses or donated them to churches. Generally, however, the names of the crosses are diversified according to their use, although they also reflect their form.

Yangät mäsqäl or cross suspended on the neck is a common expression in Ethiopia, although it does not seem to be included in Kane's Amharic-English Dictionary; instead, the term *yäləbb* or pectoral cross is used on the authority of David Buxton (Buxton 1970: pl. 105). The term is also used by Elisabeth Biasio in her catalogue of the Ethiopian exhibition at the Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich in Switzerland and she explains that this is a category of the "larger crosses hung on a long cord and worn on the breast". She also uses the term *yangät mäsqäl* for smaller crosses (Biasio 2004: 220–222). It seems, however, that the Ethiopian women in the countryside rarely wear large crosses such as those illustrated in Biasio's book and therefore would not differentiate the names of crosses according to their size or how they wear them. It follows that this term is a recent translation of the English term "pectoral cross" probably created outside of the Ethiopian context. Ethiopian scholar, Bantalem Tadesse, introduced yet another term for pectoral crosses – *yädärät mäsqäl*, or literally chest cross – and he explains that "Ethiopian ladies wear them as a sign of Christianity or as ornament" (Bantalem 2003: 367). It is apparent that he was referring to ladies belonging to the upper echelons of society.

Small neck crosses are occasionally worn for protection against sickness or evil spirits. Young children wear them together with various trinkets on a string tightly attached around the neck. In Təgray, for protective purposes, grown women can be seen wearing crosses on their foreheads fastened by a cord. In 2004, at the Adwa market, a woman was observed wearing a small diamond-shaped brass cross, which is named *šärura*. A photograph of a similar style of wearing crosses – this time by women at Yəha, also in Təgray – was reproduced in the 2002 catalogue of the Ethiopian exhibition at the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde in Munich (Girma Fisseha 2002: fig. 137). The custom

must have a long tradition and in the last decade of the 19th century, the British traveller Bent wrote that in Adwa "every woman wears three silver crosses tightly bound round her forehead . . ." (Bent 1896: 123–124).

The categories of hand and processional crosses can be described together. Although they differ in their technical aspects, since the hand cross has a grip while the processional cross has a hollow shaft into which the pole supporting the cross is inserted, the use of both is so interconnected in the liturgy and ceremonial aspects of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church that their full meaning and importance is fully revealed when described together.

There is, however, a fundamental division of hand crosses into two classes according to their size and use. In the first, the crosses average from 10 to 25 cm in length, although occasionally some are longer, and in the second, the crosses are generally between 30 to 40 cm long, although some are substantially longer, extending up to 60 cm or more.

The use of the crosses in the first class is strictly limited to the clergy who always carry them as a sign of their profession. When faced with a ceremonial occasion, or being photographed, the priest identifies himself by holding his hand cross in front of his breast (*fig. 1*). The cross is traditionally passed from father to son and remains in the family from one generation to the next. In March 2004, I was able to photograph a brightly painted cross which the owner had inherited from his grandfather (*fig. 2*).

The usual name given to the personal crosses of the clergy is *yä'əḡḡ mäsqäl* or hand cross which in Kane's Amharic-English Dictionary is translated as manual cross (Kane 1990: 506). In the 1960s, however, a Church scholar working at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Abäba, considered the designation *anästāñña mäsqäl* or small cross as more correct.

The use of a particular kind of hammered iron cross with a very long handle and a small diamond-shaped cross at the top is still under discussion. Their ornamentation consists of a set of small holes, which, when viewed against the light, distinctly displays the pattern of the cross. This specific type of cross is believed to date from the 15th or 16th century. In Ora Mäsqäl village situated north of Adigrat, Agamä in Təgray, a knowledgeable

priest serving Ćärqos church designated this kind of a cross as *wänfit mäsqäl* or sieve cross (*fig. 4*) and explained that present-day deacons carry it during the incensing ceremony. However, such crosses could also be easily extended towards the faithful to be kissed if the priest happened to be on horseback. A 15th- or early 16th-century painting (Lepage 1975: 361) on the wall of the *Abunä Yəm'atä* Church of Guḥ in the Valley of Gär'altä clearly illustrates this possibility (*fig. 3*).

A second classification includes the crosses which are specifically used for the holy liturgy. They are of three kinds. The first are the crosses exclusively used by the officiating priests in the course of the liturgy and therefore their designation is *mäsqäl qəddase* or liturgy cross and should not be touched by laymen. In the countryside, crosses of this kind are usually wooden. The liturgical cross is permanently kept within the *mäqdäs* or the sanctuary of the church and placed in the *mānbärä tabot* or wooden chest with shelves which serves as a kind of altar (Hammerschmidt 1965: 4). These crosses do not differ appreciably from those of the other two kinds. However, the form of one liturgy cross photographed in Däbrä Gənfal Šəllase, Tāmben, is of distinctly ancient origin (*fig. 5*).

The second kind of cross is used for incensing and therefore designated *yä'ətan* or incense cross. In his left hand, the deacon rests the cross on his left shoulder while in his right hand he vigorously swings his censer. The officiating priests and the deacons circle three times around the *mānbärä tabot*. After that the deacon alone walks among the congregation wafting incense. He also carries the cross in the same manner and swings the incense burner during the blessing of the faithful performed by the officiating priest. This type of cross is the largest of its kind. Although generally wooden (*fig. 6*), they also are made of brass and various grades or alloys of silver (*fig. 7*).

The third kind of cross does not have any special name, however it is used by *däbtāras*, who are unordained members of the clergy, for their liturgical dance. In the countryside, one or two of these crosses are kept on the church window-sills close to the area where the dance is performed, instead of being kept in the church storehouse. They are most often made of wood and are quite large.

One such cross was photographed in the church of *Arba'atu ansäsa* or the Four Living Creatures in the vicinity of Kiyazba K^waqa in Tämben (fig. 8).

It appears that in the past large hand crosses were carried on solemn occasions, such as those seen and recorded by the members of the 1913 German Aksum Expedition. They assigned such crosses the name "procession-hand crosses" (DAE 1913: III, 104), but did not record their local name. This use of hand crosses appears to be a practice that is no longer customary.

In the case of processional crosses, their characteristic feature is a socketed shaft which serves for mounting them on a strong pole known as *mäšor* or handle. Although technically the shaft serves to support the cross, according to the interpretation of Ethiopian church scholars, its real function is to protect the cross from being touched (Lepage 1975: 74).

Processional crosses are used on "every *qəddase* day" occasions – an expression meaning whenever the liturgy is performed. This includes displaying the cross during the reading of the Gospels and other sacred texts as well as holding it up to be viewed at the end of the service for the final blessing. After the prayers, the deacon assisting the officiating priest will carry the processional cross to the front of the sanctuary, while the priest carries the hand cross which is used for the liturgy. It is with this cross that he then blesses the people of the congregation who may also kiss it. The display of the large mounted cross is the ultimate sign that the holy liturgy is concluded and the people may depart.

A rare depiction of two types of crosses used during the liturgy is found in the miniature the *gädlä* or Acts of *Abunä Mädhani-nä 3gzi*, founder of Däbrä Bänkol. The miniature shows one of his disciples Samu'el (probably founder of Däbrä Halle Luya) celebrating the liturgy and, on the altar, the sacrificial bread and wine or "the heavenly Lamb became to him secretly the earthly [or real]", according to the inscription. One type is the *mäsqäl qəddase* or liturgy cross which the officiating priest holds in his hand while reading the Gospel of Luke, line 1, 26, and the second is a processional cross held by a deacon with the *säbän* hanging from its lower arm (fig. 9).

Processional crosses are also displayed during the yearly

feast of *Mäsqäl* or "The Exaltation of the Cross", on Epiphany and Palm Sunday as well as funerals. Although these great feasts are at times very spectacular, they are considered less significant for the life of the Church than the holy liturgy. On the other hand, Manoel Barradas, a 17th-century missionary, noted that when the body is taken to the church, it is not accompanied by crosses, torches or candles (Barradas 1996: 87).

The designations – *mäšor*, *qum* (Habtä Mika'el Täsämma 1934), *qäqwami* (Muluwärq 2003: 51) or *quwame mäsqäl* or cross mounted on a base (Kane 1990: 506) – all refer in a broad sense to the "upright position" or "standing" character of the cross mounted on a pole. However, its designation, *yäburake mäsqäl* or blessing cross during the liturgy, refers to its major and most significant function. It is for this reason that this designation is more precise than the term "processional cross".

The bearer of the cross ensures that the cloth hangs along the shaft of the cross and covers it well because of a clear understanding that the sacred object itself should not be touched. This practice has evolved from the symbolic meaning of the cross which represents both the pieces of wood on which Christ's body was crucified and by implication the body itself, while the cloth symbolically invokes the shroud in which Christ's body was wrapped (Lepage 1975: 77). Another explanation given by traditional Church scholars is that the cloth represents the colobium or loin-cloth of Christ at the Crucifixion (Lepage 1975: 75), and for this reason the cloth should be white (fig. 10). Evidence of this is found in the 15th-century Acts of Märhä Krəstos, the abbot of Däbrä Libanos. Shortly after his accession to the throne in 1478, the new ruler, 3skəndər, while still a boy, visited the Monastery of Märhä Krestos with his mother, Romna, and donated a golden cross, wrapped in a white silk cloth (Kur 1972: 81) known as a *kufar* (Baeteman 1929: col. 715).

Also the term *gəmgə* – a kind of red silk cloth used for curtains – was used in certain 14th-century documents, but only one 19th-century copy is known. According to Getatchew Haile, the cloth is also applied for covering crosses (Getatchew Haile 1980: 163–164, 169).

It appears, however, that in many places these traditions have

long-since been forgotten and today the priests are of the opinion that the colour of the *sābān* is of no consequence. In practice therefore, the protective cloth is rarely white and a great variety of brightly coloured textiles are used for wrapping processional crosses (fig. 11). It seems that also in the past, the rule was not strictly observed as indicated by a certain 15th-century miniature (fig. 12).

C.F. Beckingham and G.W.B. Huntingford who edited the text of the records of Francisco Alvares suggested the name *yānazarawi mäsqāl*, “the Cross of Him of Nazareth”, which “has a socketed head about 18 inches long carried on a pole”. They give the same name to small metal crosses for “daily use inside the church” (Alvares 1961: 77). Kane, on the other hand, applies this name to the “large manual or processional cross” (Kane 1990: 506). A further complication is that in the countryside of Taḡray the expression *yānazrawi mäsqāl* is at times used as a synonym for *śāʾal səqlät* (image of the Crucifixion): the Crucifix. The latter correct nomenclature is found in Kane’s dictionary (Kane 1990: 505). This designation had, in fact, already been used in a late 16th-century text (Sergew Hable-Selassie 1993b: 50–51). Another expression used is *qāranyo mäsqāl* also found in Kane’s dictionary as the Cross of Golgotha on which Jesus was crucified: Latin cross with Crucifix (Kane 1990: 506).

A list of objects, sacred and profane, kept in the treasury of Şəyon Maryam Church in Aksum, is of some importance for the study of the names of crosses. The Italian scholar, Conti Rossini, translated the list but experienced some difficulty with certain expressions. In list no. IX, one golden *māsbākya mäsqāl* is mentioned and two *mäsqāl māsbākya qārñä bāgʿə* (Conti Rossini 1910: 14–15). The text probably refers to two different kinds of crosses. Conti Rossini translates *māsbākya* as “bâton pour exorcisme”, which in connection with the cross is open to question. It seems, however, that the writer used the expression *māsbākya mäsqāl* for a cross affixed on the top of a staff, which would indicate a processional cross. Regarding the expression *qārñä bāgʿə*, the Italian scholar declares that he has been unable to discover the meaning of it. Kane, on the other hand, repeats the explanation in Käsate Bərhan Täsämma’s dictionary which reads “cross adorned

with arabesques or curlicues” (1990: 506). Yet this is one of the rare occasions where Ethiopians have defined the cross by its form and, by implication, its symbolic meaning. The expression *qārñä bāgʿə* or Horn of the Lamb (litt. ram) became the designation of a particular variety of cross, whose arms extended outwards into wide flaring ends with each tip bending downwards in a spiral. The expression “Lamb” is known to have been used by the people of the Old Testament for their ritual sacrifices and is the source for many symbols, while in the New Testament it is identified with Jesus Christ (Lurker 1990: 213–217). The Ethiopian Christians apparently related the expression “Horn of the Lamb” to the well-known utterance of St John the Baptist who, upon seeing Jesus coming towards him, said: “Look, there is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world” (John 1, 29) and this, in turn, served to designate the crosses in question.

In fact, there are three processional crosses preserved in Ethiopia in which the sculptured head of the ram is part of the shaft. The first cross, *qārñä bāgʿə* (fig. 38), is kept in Ora Mäsqäl Čärqos church situated north-east of Addigrat in Agamä which itself is of great antiquity. The second is a bronze processional cross at the Monastery of Abräntant in Wäldəbba (fig. 13) cast with the head of the ram turned upwards on a shaft. It also is said to bear the name *qārñä bāgʿə*. The two faces of the cross are adorned with glass encrustation, a feature which is very unusual for the 14th to 15th centuries to which Mercier believes it is possible to ascribe the cross (Girma Elias 1977: 118, fig. 2). Due to the cross ornamentation of the extremities of the lower arms, which is characteristic of the oldest crosses, the 14th century appears to be the earliest feasible date for this cross.

The name of the third cross, *Näwa bāgʿu* or Behold the Lamb, is the only one of the three which bears a direct reference to St John the Baptist. The ram’s head with long curving horns is attached to the shaft. The cross itself is a reliquary with the crucifix inside (Spencer 1972: 72–73). The cover of the reliquary was probably added in the 15th century. The Polish scholar, Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, has hypothesised that Fayum in Egypt is the place of origin of the Crucifix (Balicka-Witakowska 1988: 107–110). How much these crosses influenced the Horn of the Ram designa-

tion *qärnä bägʿə* is not clear, but the existence of the above crosses suggests that the name is also of ancient origin.

Other crosses on the same list in Aksum's Şayon Maryam Church are identified only by the material from which they were made. One is silver and one is gold. In addition, the list includes two made of copper and two iron crosses, which clearly indicates that the metals from which the crosses were made was the main criteria of identification. The problem is that in Amharic there is no clear differentiation between bronze and brass, both of which are designated *nāhas* or *nas* (Leslau 1976: cols. 284 and 286), while at the 1955 Gondär exhibition, the terms *nas* and *mädab* (copper) were alternatively used for crosses which were almost certainly made of brass.

The list also includes the expression *ərfä mäsqaḷ*, which Conti Rossini translates in two ways. One is a spoon to "serve Communion" and the second, "a bâton carried by a deacon and topped with a cross". The first meaning is generally accepted and Kane explains the characteristic feature of the eucharistic spoon – which is that the handle terminates in a cross (Kane 1990: 506). The name is still in common use and one such 15th-century spoon was illustrated in a recent publication (Mercier 2001: 61). The top of its handle is in the form of a short-armed patée cross. The second meaning given by Conti Rossini might refer to a processional cross, but this requires further verification (Conti Rossini 1910: 14).

Finally, an object is listed as the "golden *sändäq*". Conti Rossini translates *sändäq* as "bâton pour prêtre" and explains in the footnote that the clergy used long sticks with a rounded knob to lean on while at prayer (Conti Rossini 1910: 14–15). The term "golden", of course, applies only to the rounded top and not the staff, and occasionally the globe-like knob is made of brass thinly plated with gold. Such staffs are still used today. However, they are called *mäqqʿamiya*.

The term *sändäq* listed by Conti Rossini and frequently mentioned in 17th- and 18th-century royal chronicles is a word of Persian origin (Dillmann 1865: col. 374). It was applied to the insignia which Ethiopian sovereigns and some provincial rulers displayed on top of their tents or pavilions (Guidi 1955: II, 237, 349). The *sändäq* consisted of a sturdy staff and a large brass sphere on

top. The sphere was always ornamented with a cross and occasionally a small red pennon was attached to the staff (Blundell 1922: 272). They were also carried on solemn occasions as depicted in the miniature found in an early 18th-century Psalter (fig. 132). Although such objects can still be found in the storehouses of the countryside churches, since they fell out of use, their traditional name has also been lost (fig. 15). Elisabeth Biasio in her description of Alfred Ilg's Ethiopian collection, reproduces the *sändäq* and designates it as *bäträ aronʿ*? = Aron's staff? (Biasio 2004: 199). However, as far as it has been possible to ascertain, there is no specific name for such crosses. Also, there are no specific names for crosses affixed to the tops of various objects such as the staves of banners, ceremonial umbrellas (Harris 1844: 216) (fig. 163) and tent-like structures sheltering church altars and those which were displayed on royal and church crowns. Neither is there any special designation for the crosses on staffs carried by old nuns, hermits and, in the past, by the heads of monasteries. Some Ethiopian ear-picks have handles based on the cross, which appears in numerous variations (fig. 14). Such ear-picks follow patterns common in neck crosses, and have a single ring. They were often worn round the neck (Pankhurst 1979: 107). Biasio designates such ear-picks *kuk mawça*, meaning ear spoon, or *balä kuk mawça mäsqaḷ*, meaning ear spoon cross (Biasio 2004: 223), a second name which does seem to be generally used.

In the interests of clarity, therefore, the following names will be used: neck crosses, hand crosses, and processional (blessing) crosses. These are then sub-divided into liturgy and incense crosses. In this text, the term "neck cross" will be used for crosses which correspond to the distinct characteristic of suspension from the neck and attachment either to a cord or necklace.

Like a number of other Christian traditions, the sign of the cross, as well as the cross itself – as a physical object – has found varied and intense expression in the religious practices and artistic creativity of the Ethiopian people extending back to their acceptance of Christianity in the 4th century A.D. The cult of the Cross, in fact, originated in Syro-Palestinian circles. It was later expanded to Coptic Egypt and Christian Nubia and eventually was introduced into Ethiopia. It is there that it found its distinctive and vibrant manifestation in the ceremonial traditions, liturgy and literature of the Ethiopian Orthodox (Täwaḥədo) Church as well as in the devotional practices, attitudes and customs of Ethiopian Christians everywhere. The cross became, in effect, a powerful emblem, whose magical properties were believed to provide protection against sickness and evil spirits. It also possessed the power to perform miracles. In short, it was central to every facet of the lives of Ethiopian Christians – a visible testimony to their faith and devotion, which was also expressed by the common name *gäbrä mäsqäl* or Servant of the Cross. Several emperors took *gäbrä mäsqäl* as their regal name, among them Lalibäla, during the late 12th–13th century of the Zag'we dynasty, Amdä-Şeyon, 1314–1344, one of the most outstanding Ethiopian rulers, and Yəśḥq, 1413–1430.

Coptic and Nubian Antecedents

Ethiopians shared with Egyptian Copts and Christian Nubians a fervent belief in the Cross and its veneration, whose literature and art are similarly vivid expressions of the intensity of their faith.

There are two known translations of an ancient Nubian hymn to the Cross. In 1913, one text tentatively dated to the 10th-century (Berlin, Ms. Orient Quart 1020) was translated (Griffith 1913: 41–53). In 1989, a new translation of the better preserved “*Stau-ros-Text*” was published. The parchment was discovered in Egypt and is tentatively ascribed to the year 1000. In the text, the opening sentence runs as follows: “A speech that our Saviour, who rules over us, Jesus Christ, spoke concerning his suffering and his

coming in glory and the glorious, life-giving Cross, and which he caused his holy apostles to know, when he was going to ascend to the heavens". Christ continues by describing how he will come for the second time: "When, sitting upon the throne of glory, I will judge the whole world, the glorious Cross will stand in my right hand, in the valley of Josaphat; its root will irrigate the earth, and its branch will overshadow the third part of the earth. And all who have believed in the Cross with their whole heart will stand under it. If he has fed the hungry in its name or clothed the naked or, moreover, written a book of its praise and given it in a church, believing in it with his whole heart, when he comes to those who have followed it, he will rest under the shadow of the Cross, until I cease judging the world. And after I have ceased separating the just and the sinners, again the Cross will ascend to the heavens in glory. And all who believe in it, following it, will ascend to the kingdom of the heavens, in order to inherit eternal life and the paradise of joy. And by no means will I judge them, either in word or in deed, but the power of the glorious Cross will save and rescue them. And now, O my holy limbs(?), go forth and preach in the whole world, in order that, following after it, invoking continually(?) the glorious Cross, they may have a shield which will save and which is strong armour, which protects with such glory(?) on that fearful day . . ." (Browne 1989: 22–29).

The Coptic version of the "Stauros-Text" has not been published. However, an example of the Coptic hymn to the Cross is part of a prayer book ascribed to the 10th century. The codex was found in 1965 at Qasr al-Wizz in Central Nubia on the floor of a ruined medieval monastic cell. The opening corresponds closely to the old Nubian "Stauros-Text" and its second part seems to be similarly parallel in content until the beginning of the Coptic hymn to the Cross which does not occur in the same form in the old Nubian "Stauros-Text". This part of the prayer book is believed to refer to the gathering of the Apostles on the Mount of Olives before the Crucifixion, at which Christ himself recited a hymn to the Cross:

*Rise up, rise up, O holy Cross, and lift me, O Cross.
I shall mount upon you, O Cross. They shall hang me
upon you as a witness to them.
Receive me yourself, O Cross. Amen.*

Do not weep, O Cross, but be joyful, O Cross. Amen.

I have put on the Crown of the Kingdom (Emmel 2003: 24–25).

Hymns to the Cross were reputedly common in Near Eastern Christianity. In Nubian art, the Cross also found its particular expression in huge depictions on the walls of the churches. One such cross was preserved in the Cathedral of Faras. The cross is 2 metres high; and where the arms intersect the circle containing the bust of Christ the circle is surrounded by the Four Living Creatures (Michałowski 1974: 234–240). The accompanying dedication reads "Lord Jesus Christ [and the] Cross guard, bless, protect, strengthen and help thy servant Paimy, daughter of Anne. So be it . . . Amen" (Jakobielski 1974: 298).

A similar expression of Cross veneration in Ethiopian art is found in the rock hewn church of Wuqro Mäsqäl Krəstos in Wag which is ascribed to the 12th–13th-century Zag'we period. Huge crosses cut in relief adorn the walls of the church sanctuary (fig. 17).

Ethiopian Written Texts

Aksumite coins even included symbolic inscriptions about the Cross such as "pleasing the country", bringing "joy and peace to the people", and "exalted by the people" as well as the translation of Constantine the Great's battle cry: "In this sign, you will find victory" (Hahn 1996a: 86–88; 2003: 768).

Moreover, there are several texts which glorify and exalt the Cross of the Crucifixion and a few laudatory insertions concerning the Cross in the text of the liturgy are significant. One of them is the Supplication of the Cross which was composed during the 15th century and made part of the liturgy (Getatchew Haile 1981a: 135). Another text refers expressly to the Finding of the True Cross. This is the homily on the True Cross for the Feast of St Helena by Kirakos, Bishop of Jerusalem. According to an apocryphal story, Kirakos was, in fact, Judas (the Jew) who was present when Queen Helena found the Cross. He converted to Christianity, became a bishop and eventually was martyred during the reign of Julian the Apostate. The earliest text of the homily EMML V, Ms. 1763, dates to the early 14th century (Getatchew Haile 1981b: V, 218).

A particular text bearing the name Rampart of the Cross,

Ḥäsurä mäsqäl, is widely known and used. There are also texts which, although they do not bear the above title, are somewhat similar to the text of *Ḥäsurä mäsqäl*. This is the *Wəddase wägənay lä-mäsqäl* or the Lauds and Thanks to the Cross. Some texts bearing the title of Rampart of the Cross relate to the above Lauds and are of purely religious inspiration (Ms. Abb. 162 presently held by the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris). Other texts still grouped under the name of the *Ḥäsurä mäsqäl* are a series of prayers which are not related to each other and only one of them is an invocation to the Cross. Such texts have a significantly apotropaic character with the inherent possibility of invoking magical intervention (Ms. Abb. 134 in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris). The third group of Rampart of the Cross texts is strictly magical (Lifchitz 1940: 87–88). Many include substantial variations of the *Ḥäsurä mäsqäl* text, which apparently was copied time and again throughout the centuries and was widely used as a means of warding off evil. The fact that these invocations were commissioned by individuals indicates that the patrons' wishes were paramount when it came to dictating the form and, in part, the contents of these entreaties.

Ms. Abb. 162 belongs to the first group of Rampart of the Cross texts. It includes a copy of the *Ḥäsurä mäsqäl*, made sometime between 1837–1848 for the French traveller and scholar, Antoine d'Abbadie, whose name is inserted into the text. The adoration of the Cross is expressed with powerful eloquence: "Cross above all things; Cross: shield and enclosure of the Church; Cross: which destroys enemies; Cross: foundation of the Church; Cross: light of the Church; Cross: right and left of the Church; Cross: beginning and end of the Church; Cross: rampart and enclosure of the Church; Cross: shield and spear of the Church; Cross: prophecy of the Prophets; Cross: sermon of the Apostles; Cross: crown of the Martyrs; Cross: refuge of the poor; Cross: succour of the distressed; Cross: pride of the righteous; Cross: strength and vigour of the exhausted; Cross: which makes the dumb speak; Cross: ear and faith of the saints; Cross: guide of the blind; Cross: high in the sky and below on the earth; Cross: wood of life and of salvation; Cross: casting away evil spirits; Cross: calmness of the sea and harbour of ships; Cross: which leads pagans [to conversion]; Cross: bread of the starving; Cross: fountain for the thirsty; Cross:

clothes for the naked; Cross: glory and beauty for the traveller; Cross: redemption of the wicked; Cross: expulsion of the Jews; Cross: glory for the Church; Cross: father of orphans; Cross: which assuages difficulties and helps the distressed; Cross: the rod that struck Satan . . ." (Lifchitz 1940: 95–96).

The *Ḥäsurä mäsqäl* found on fols. 123v to 138v in the 15th-century Ms. Abb. 134 in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, belongs to a second group. The text was commissioned by a woman named Färe Maryam or Fruit of Mary, who prescribed that any person wearing this booklet around his neck while praying for her would be saved from sickness and evil. Then follows a lengthy plea for help against Satan with an enumeration of all possible sicknesses and only in the last paragraph does Färe Maryam turn to a prayer which again refers to the power of the Cross: "Cross of Christ – resurrection of the dead . . . which drives away the demons . . . eternal light . . . purification of sins . . . which brings light to the blind . . . which strengthens the hips of the lame . . . offers help to the afflicted . . . which gives strength to kings . . . hope to the martyrs . . . which consecrates priests, hope of the monks . . . glory of the saints . . . glorification of the faithful . . . hope of the despairing . . . rampart and enclosure for all who believe in it . . . which guides those who walk in the darkness . . . hope of the just. In the same manner, cure your servant Färe Maryam of anything which is evil, of the demon and Satan as well as of all evil actions of man. Help me and rescue me by your Cross [and] by the sign of your grace and shield me by your salvation forever and ever" (Lifchitz 1940: 181–183).

Prayers designated as the Rampart of the Cross of the third type are always attributed to the Prophet Jeremiah. One such prayer is found on fols. 75v to 84v in the mid-16th-century Ms. Borgia 22 at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. The prayer was commissioned by a certain Kəflä Giyorgis who directs that the booklet should be suspended from the neck. He begs to be provided with the Rampart of the Cross to which he confides his spirit and body, his children, servants and all animals. He asks protection against his enemies and the evil eye, as well as various sicknesses. These entreaties are alternated with the cursing of Satan (Lifchitz 1940: 187–203).

The prayer of the Rampart of the Cross is also found on scrolls. Although basically similar to the above prayer in the Ms. Borgia they are usually shorter. There are also different texts still being designated as Rampart of the Cross prayers. In one such scroll aeth. 226 at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, probably dated to the same period as Borgia 22, a certain Gäbrä Mäsqäl or Servant of the Cross, who commissioned the scroll, had declared that he made a sign of the Cross on his face and his forehead and marked his back with the sign of the Cross, so that it would be a shield and a force for him at all times. The prayer continues with a request for the salvation of his body and the protection of his worldly goods including all possessions in his house and in the fields "whether far or near" and he also seeks protection against all invaders (Lifchitz 1940: 207–211).

The Cross in the Liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

The most important expression of the veneration of the cross is manifested during the divine liturgy. The types of crosses used would include hand crosses of varying size as well as processional crosses. The oldest recorded description of the church liturgy is a detailed account by Francisco Alvares, chaplain of the Portuguese embassy to Ethiopia from 1520 to 1526. According to Alvares's observations, during the service, priests used crosses on eight occasions. The first was while the loaves of eucharistic bread were being carried from the church kitchen to the church, accompanied by a thurible and the ringing of bells. The cross might have been either of the processional type or a large benediction cross (Alvares 1961: 79).

The second occasion was when the priest began the mass chanting the Alleluia and then offered a blessing with his small cross. When the Epistle was to be read, the one who took the book from the altar to the door was blessed by the officiating priest with the same small cross, while a second priest carried another cross, presumably a processional cross. When the Gospel was about to be read, the officiating priest gave a similar blessing to the one who carried the book to the door facing the east. Another carried either a processional or benediction cross and a thurible, while the third assistant rang a bell. When the Gospel was brought back to the al-

tar, the officiating priest made circuits around it and wafted incense many times. Later, turning towards the altar, he gave numerous blessings with his cross. Finally, the eighth and last time the cross was used during the consecration of the Host, the rites of communion and holy water as well as the washing of the eucharistic vessel. When the mass was completed, the officiating priest and all those at the altar took a cross and a bell and, chanting as they went, proceeded to the main door. This signified the end of the ceremony and the faithful then made their way home (Alvares 1961: 80–83). In his description of the liturgy, Father Alvares asserts that hand crosses were used for daily liturgy, while on Saturdays, Sundays and feast days processional crosses were displayed (Alvares 1961: 71).

We also learn from the pronouncements on religious ceremonies made by Zär'a Ya'eqob, 1434–1468, in his Book of Light, *māṣḥafä bərhan*, that when the liturgy is concluded, the faithful should gather in the special community hall to partake of bread and beer. The occasion commences with a benediction by the priest who extends the cross towards the east, west, north and south while reciting the words of blessing. At the same time the faithful make the sign of the cross (Conti Rossini 1965: II, 14).

Four centuries later, the liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church – translated into English by Marcos Daoud alias Hafiz Daoud – was printed in 1954 in Addis Abäba (Daoud 1954) and the English and Arabic versions in Cairo in 1959 (Daoud 1959). The basic order of the prescribed blessings is given. The text particularises the instances when the officiating priest should bless the objects on the altar and the assistant priests or deacons as well as the faithful with the sign of the cross while reciting the Anaphoras. In his account of the liturgy, Alvares thus describes having seen the priests actually giving blessings with crosses which "they hold in their hands", while Daoud in his text exclusively uses the expressions "sign of the cross or blessing" without any further specification.

According to the current count, however, during the eucharistic liturgy, a blessing is performed forty-two times. On twenty-one occasions this is done with an actual cross and another twenty-one times with a sign of the cross only (personal commu-

nications in 2004 from Dr Retta Alemayehu, Toronto, and Ato Telaye Gebremedhin, Addis Abäba), which is a dramatic demonstration of the role of the cross in the liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

In the 1930s, C.H. Walker, a keen observer of Ethiopia's customs, summarised the information he was given by local informants about the use of crosses in the liturgy: "In a church there may be many crosses – three of wood and three of silver. Of these, the last two will be small, but one will be large, bearing a picture of the Crucifixion. Also, there is a large cross of red bronze which the priest will use on Sundays and for constant [regular] service, but the large silver cross with the picture of Our Master they will bear forth only on days of festival. One of the small silver crosses the officiating priest will hold for the performance of his duty and the others will hang in [inside] the Altar, for this has many doors as receptacles" (1933: 101–102). This was in reference to the basic set of crosses at the time which might – in particular churches – undergo significant changes. It should be noted that the altar in Ethiopian churches – the *mānbārā tabot* – is a kind of cupboard with shelves, which can be enclosed by means of panel doors (Hammerschmidt 1965: 4).

The Cross in Communal as well as Personal Expressions of Faith

In the distant past, a display of crosses enhanced the splendour of Ethiopian rulers' coronations at Aksum. The *abunä* and the clergy attended the ceremony "all robed and with crosses and thuribles in their hands" (Beckingham 1954: 92).

In the 15th century, Zär'a Ya'eqob, a ruler renowned for his edicts concerning Church matters, decreed that whenever priests, deacons, monks and the faithful, male or female, assembled in the church, they must all first make the sign of the cross in "the name of the Trinity" before beginning the recitation of their prayers (Conti Rossini 1965: I, 28). He also instructed people to gather at noon, place the icon of the Virgin Mary with the cross on its right in an elevated position, and to sing alleluyas. If no icon was available, a hand cross could be used, made either of iron or wood or even grass (Conti Rossini 1965: II, 2).

The most powerful communal manifestation, however, of the veneration of the cross is the feast of *Mäsqäl* or "The Exaltation of the Cross", which is commemorated on *Mäskäräm* 17, that is 27 September. It is believed that the celebration was institutionalised during the reign of Zär'a Ya'eqob (Caquot 1955: 94). This feast is assimilated into the major feasts of the Lord and is therefore celebrated everywhere in a similar manner. The yearly commemoration of the Finding of the True Cross of the Crucifixion by Queen Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine the Great, 306–337, also named *Mäsqäl*, is commemorated on *Mäggabit* 10, that is, on 17 March, and is a completely separate occasion from the September *Mäskäräm* Feast of the Cross, which coincides with the end of the rainy season and the beginning of the sunny dry weather during which the crops in the fields are ripening. Therefore this particular religious feast is also a celebratory day of hope and rejoicing.

The ceremony consists of building a large wooden bonfire, known as *dämära* in Amharic, which involves piling long pieces of firewood in a special way. This is decorated with green branches and topped by a bunch of flowers. Until 1974, the sovereign or his representative presided over this ceremony, which was attended by Church dignitaries and high officials of the government, with the highest in rank being responsible for kindling the bonfire (Getatchew Haile 2001: 33). The ceremony always includes a blessing by a priest and ceremonial walk around the bonfire. The next morning, the faithful take the residual ash, mix it with butter and use it to make a sign of the cross on their foreheads (Walker 1933: 91).

The French Capuchin missionary François Azais, who attended the celebration of the feast of *Mäsqäl* in the countryside of the Harrär region, recorded the traditions connected with it and the mystical significance of certain parts of the ceremony. He particularly noted a kind of invocation which had the flavour of the *ḥaṣura mäsqäl* recited by the people while circling the *dämära*:

"O Cross! which is our strength;
O Cross! which is our fortress;
O Cross! which is our redemption;
O Cross! which is a remedy for our soul;

*O Cross! repudiated by Jews but we believe strongly in it;
O Cross! in believing in it, we found health and salvation".*

The *dāmāra* itself represents the tall wood-pile which the priest Kirakos advised people to build and kindle according to the story of Queen Helena's miraculous finding of the True Cross. The custom of the faithful to bring a branch adorned at the top with flowers and throw it on the wood-pile is to honour the people of Jerusalem who brought wood for St Helena. The clergy makes three circuits of the *dāmāra* in honour of the Holy Trinity. Finally a series of predictions are made about good crops or famine depending on the direction in which the *dāmāra* slants as it burns down. Galloping riders race their horses headlong into the heat of the bonfire accompanied by the applause of those present for the occasion. Also, Azais records the fact that hot ash was applied to people's foreheads in the belief that this would preserve and protect them (Azais 1923: 185–188).

A highly visible and omnipresent expression of fervent Christian faith is the Ethiopian practice of kissing the cross. In the past as well as today, when a member of the faithful meets a priest, he bows. The priest normally does not return the bow, but instead pulls out his own personal cross. He places the cross on the palm of his right hand and holding it firmly with his thumb extends it to the faithful who bows again while the priest proceeds with the ceremony of the veneration of the cross.

He begins by first touching the forehead of the faithful with the tip of the cross, then moves it to the person's lips and finally he offers the bottom of the handle of the cross to be kissed and the ceremony is over. Generally the priest uses only one hand while extending the cross for kissing, but when two priests meet, the junior priest bows to the senior priest who brings out his cross and offers it to be kissed in the same manner. The only difference, however, is that the priest offering the cross to his confrere uses both hands, the left hand supporting the right hand which is holding the cross. Normally, all priests perform this basic ritual; some, however, may add their own variations (communication of *Käññazmač* Tilahun Paulos on 26 December 2003).

In country churches, after the liturgy has been performed, the officiating priest, while meeting those assembled in the church

compound, blesses each of them with his cross, touching their foreheads, but the ritual of kissing the cross may or may not follow.

Probably the earliest information about the custom can be drawn from the Acts of Iyäsus Mo'a (died 1292), the founder of St Stephen Monastery on Lake Ḥyq and a saint of the Ethiopian Church. His meeting with *Aṣe Yəkuno Amlak*, 1270–1285, is described shortly before the ruler established himself on the throne of Ethiopia. According to the description, Iyäsus Mo'a blessed the king who kissed the cross extended to him by the saint (Kur 1965: 24). Considering that the Acts in question were written at the end of the 15th century, the text reflects the worship of the cross as practised in that century, however it may be assumed that the custom had already been established much earlier. *Abunä Marcos*, head of the Ethiopian Church during the reign of *Aṣe Lebnä Dəngəl*, 1508–1540, carried a small cross, possibly silver, and offered it to all visitors. At the time of Alvares's arrival, however, he did not permit the Portuguese Ambassador to kiss his hand, but according to Ethiopian custom, offered his cross to him and all his attendants (Alvares 1961: 367). On a later occasion, when Alvares met the Governor of Təgre province, he kissed the cross which Alvares carried and asked that his wife be permitted to do likewise (Alvares 1961: 172–173).

Hiob Ludolf, a 17th-century German scholar, emphasises the importance of the custom. "The clergy," he writes, "carry a bare [without the figure of Christ] brass cross . . . which those whom they meet reverence with a kiss . . ." (Ludolf 1982: 228). Two French travellers, Combes and Tamisier, although rather superficial observers, travelled extensively from 1835 to 1837 in various regions of Ethiopia and particularly noted that "certain priests carry a small cross which they give to the devotees to kiss whenever they meet them along the way" (Combes 1838: III, 197).

The German missionary, Isenberg, observed a special cross veneration ceremony by *Nəguś Šahlä Šəllase* of Šäwa, 1813–1847. On Easter Sunday, in April 1840, the king proceeded to five main churches in Ankobär, and in each church he was presented with a cross to be kissed. Isenberg does not specify, but this was presumably a large benediction cross. The veneration of the cross was at the conclusion of the church service and the king as well as the people

went to their homes to celebrate the holy occasion by eating and drinking (Krapf 1968: 236). There is also the account of William Simpson who accompanied the British contingent during its campaign of 1868 in Ethiopia to produce sketches for the *Illustrated London News*. Simpson was a keen observer of the customs and ceremony of the Ethiopian Church as well as a collector. In his diary, he described the cross which he bought from the priests at Čäläqot Šəllase church in 3ndārta as “a comparatively small one, about eleven inches in length, and similar to those used by the priests in reading the service, and for presenting to the congregation to kiss” (Chojnacki 1968: 36). Finally, the chronicle of Emperor Yoḥannəs IV, 1872–1889, demonstrates that the practice of kissing the cross was extensively observed at the time (Bairu Tafla 1974: 83, 87, 89).

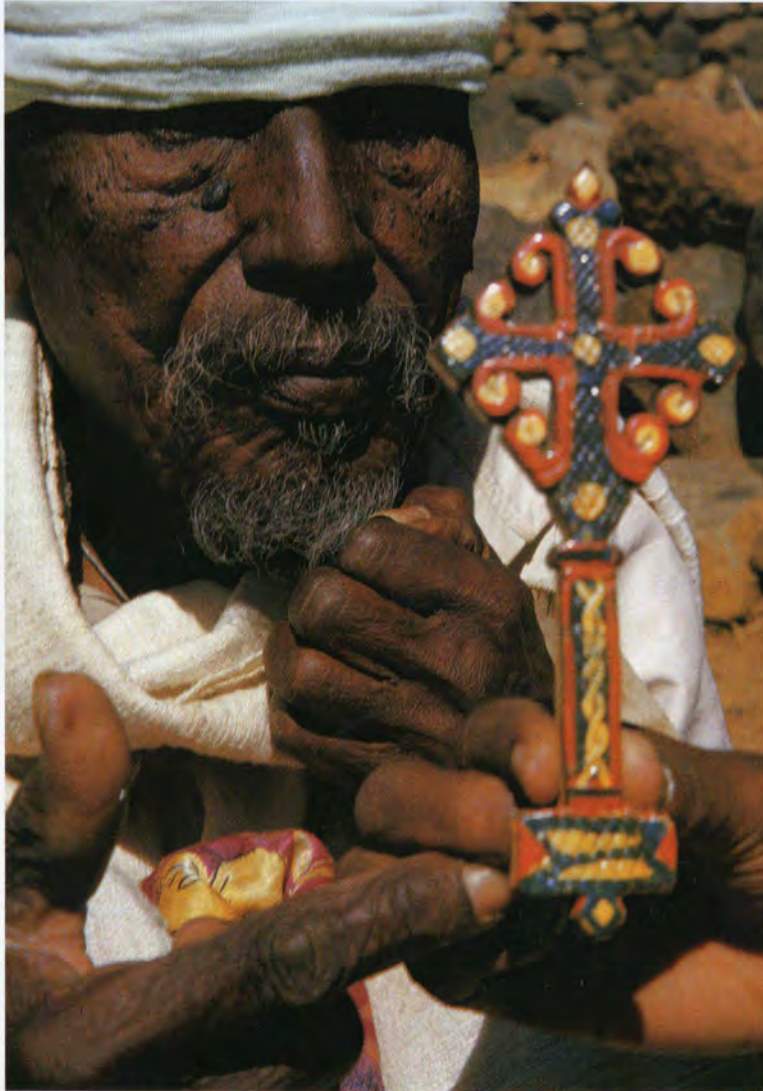
The Protective Quality of the Cross - A Medium for Miracles

According to an old belief still held by the members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, both the cross and its sign act as protection from internal and external enemies, each of which can be defeated by the power of the cross. This belief is the source of many customary practices in people's lives. During natural disasters and plagues of locusts in particular, crosses were displayed in the hope that they would avert further devastation. In the early 16th century, Alvares saw the monks of Däbrä Bizän walking in procession to the millet fields carrying altar stones (*tabot*) covered with silk, holy books (probably Gospels) and crosses (presumably processional) as well as bells and holy water. They were chanting “in the fashion of the litanies”. All this, they told Alvares, was to stop “maggots” from eating their millet (Alvares 1961: 92–93). On another occasion when Təgre was infested with locusts, the people asked the Portuguese to assist them. Inspired by what they had seen earlier at Bizän, the Portuguese suggested a procession. The Ethiopians took the altar stones and crosses, and the Portuguese took their crucifix and carried it on a staff. When the procession reached an elevated place, Alvares pronounced a denunciation of the locusts and excommunicated them. The ceremony appears to have wrought a virtual miracle, because soon afterwards heavy rains accompanied by hail killed off most of the destructive insects (Alvares 1961: 133–134).

1. Head of the Church
holding his hand cross
Dämbäčča Mika'el, Goğgam



2. Painted hand cross, 20th
century
wood, 19.0 x 7.5 cm
Addi Wafärti Maryam,
Tämben



3. *Abunä Yəm'atä Riding*,
15th–16th century
wall painting
3^{nda} Abunä Yəm'atä, Guḥ in
Gär'alta



4. Hand cross, 15th–16th
century
iron, 36.5 x 8 cm
Ora Mäsqäl Čärqos, Agamä

5. Liturgy cross, 19th–20th
century
wood, 28 x 5.5 cm
Gənfał Šəllase, Tämben



6. Incense cross, 18th–19th century
wood, 50.5 x 14.5 cm
May Anbässa, Däbrä Gännät,
3ndärta



7. Incense cross, 20th century
silver alloy, 48.5 x 12 cm
Däbrä Maryam zä-Hayda,
Šire



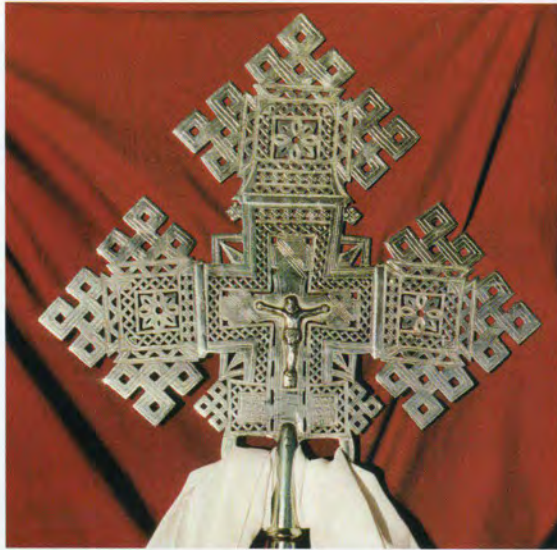
8. Hand cross for liturgical
dance, 18th–19th century
wood, 33 x 12 cm
Kiyazba K^oaqa Arba'etu
3nsäsa, Tämbön



9. The Miracle during the
Liturgy, 1916–1928
fol. 79r, miniature in *gädlä*
Abunä Mädhjaninä 3gzi',
Däbrä Bänköl, Aksum
Region



10. Processional cross with
white protective cloth,
20th century
silver alloy, 70 x 48 cm
Haṣābo Iyāsus, Aksum
Region



11. Processional cross with
colourful protective cloth,
18th century
silver, 54 x 34 cm
Dābrā Gārīma, Adwa Region



12. Eight Saints of Eastern
Churches (detail), 15th
century
fol. 110r, Ms. of the Gospels
Sāwne Maryam, Agamā



13. Processional cross (*qärnä bāg'e*), 13th–15th century
bronze, 39 x 24 cm
Däbrä Abräntant, Wäldəbba

14. Ear-pick, 19th century
silver, 5 x 2 cm
Private Collection

15. *Sändäq*, 18th–19th century
brass, 28 cm, cross 9 x 9 cm
Däbrä Maryam zä-Hayda,
Sire

16. Processional cross
designated *alaryo*, 15th
century(?)
silver, 28 x 15 cm
Däbrä Bānkol, Aksum
Region



17. Cross cut in relief,
12th–13th century
Wuqro Mäsqäl Krəstos, near
Säqota in Wag

18. Cross said to have
belonged to *Abunä Tomas*,
14th century(?)
bronze, 52 x 7.2 cm
Däbrä Maryam zä-Hayda,
Sire

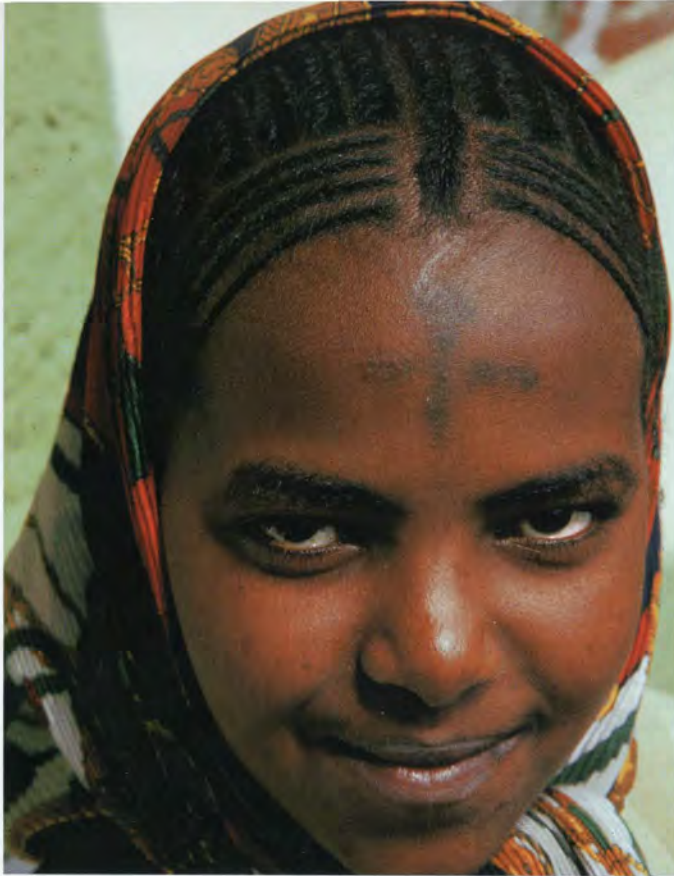
19. Girl photographed in
Haggärä Sälam, Tämben



20. Girl photographed in
Haggärä Sälam, Tämben

21. Hand cross, 20th century
plaited leather strips,
24.3 x 7.3 cm
IES Mus.(?), Addis Abäba

22. Neck cross, 20th century
plaited leather strips,
7.2 x 4 cm
Acquired in Adwa, Tägray,
Private Collection



23. *Abunä Gäbrä Mämfäs*
Qəddus wearing a scapular
with attached crosses,
18th–early 19th century
pendant double-face diptych
(detail, right panel)
IES Mus. 3795, Addis Abäba

24. Neck cross worn by a
man, 1999
glued leather straps,
5.3 x 4 cm
3^{nda} Šəllase, Šire, Private
Collection

25. Cross in stucco on
pilaster, ca. 12th–13th century
Abəraha Aşbəha Church





26. Processional cross,
13th–14th century
bronze
Däbrä Asa, Tämben

27. Anonymous, ca. 450
Aksum coin, obverse,
copper, type 66 (JJ38)



28. Armah, after 630
Aksum coin, obverse, copper
gilt, type 153 (JJ136)



29. Armah, after 630
Aksum coin, obverse,
copper, type 120 (JJ225)

30. Gersem, ca. 600
Aksum coin, obverse,
copper, type 148 (JJ49)



31a. Armah, after 630
Aksum coin, obverse,
silver gilt, type 151 (JJ75)

32. Armah, after 630
Aksum coin, obverse,
copper gilt, type 153 (JJ83)



31b. Armah, after 630
Aksum coin, reverse,
silver gilt, type 151 (JJ75)

33. Ezana, before 330
Aksum coin, obverse, gold,
type 36 pagan (JJ515)



34. Staff topped with cross,
ca. 8th–12th century
iron(?), h. 109 cm,
cross 13 x 6.5 cm
Ora Mäsqäl Čärqos, Agamä



35. Staff topped with cross,
13th–14th century
iron, h. 64 cm,
cross 12 x 6 cm
Däbra Abbay, Šire



36. Staff topped with cross,
ca. 8th–12th century
bronze(?), ca. h. 143 cm,
cross 8 x 7.5 cm
Ora Mäsqäl Čärqos, Agamä



38. Processional cross (*qärnä
bäg'e*), ca. 11th–12th century
bronze, 29 x 22 cm
Ora Mäsqäl Čärqos, Agamä



37. Neck cross, ca. 8th–13th
century
bronze, 6 x 5.8 cm
IES Mus. 6559, Addis Abäba



39. Processional cross,
ca. 11th–12th century
bronze, 30 x 20 cm
Ora Mäsqäl Čärqos, Agamä



40. (K^olešewon?) and
Təhrəyānnā, ca. 13th century
wall painting
Mäkinä Mädhane 'Alām,
Lasta



41. St Barbara, ca. 13th century
wall painting
Mäkinä Mädhane 'Alām,
Lasta



42. Five Wise Virgins,
ca. 13th century
wall painting
Mäkinä Mädhane 'Alām,
Lasta

43. Two Angels, 1270–1285
wall painting
Gännätä Maryam, Lasta



44. Saintly Monk
(unidentified), 1270–1285
wall painting
Gännätä Maryam, Lasta



45. Cross intaglio on church wall, ca. 14th century
Däbrä Şayon Maryam,
Gär'alta



46. Cross in bas-relief on church wall, 10th–12th century
Wuqro Çärqos



47. Processional cross,
12th–13th century
bronze, 23.1 x 9.9 cm
IES Mus. 4655, Addis Abäba



48. Processional cross,
12th–14th century
iron, 26.4 x 14.5 cm
Däbrä Şarabi, 3ndärta





49. Processional cross,
12th–14th century
bronze/silver(?)
Däbrä Gärima, Adwa Region

50. Processional cross,
11th–13th century
bronze, 29.5 x 13 cm
Ora Mäsqäl Čärqos, Agamä

51. Processional cross,
11th–13th century
bronze, 32 x 13.6 cm
Ora Mäsqäl Čärqos, Agamä



52. Processional cross,
12th–13th century
gilt bronze
Mādhane 'Alām Church,
Lalibāla, Lasta



53. Processional cross,
12th–13th century
bronze (shaft added)
Däbrä Asa, Tämben



54. Processional cross,
12th–13th century
bronze
Däbrä Ma'ar, Gäralta



55. St Mercurius Slaying
Julian the Apostate,
1270–1285
wall painting
Gännätä Maryam, Lasta



56. Processional cross,
12th–13th century
bronze, 21.8 x 12 cm
Lalibäla, Betä Maryam,
Lasta



57. Neck cross, 14th–15th
century
copper, 3.8 x 2.8 cm
IES Mus. 6722, Addis Abäba



58. Neck cross, 14th–15th
century
copper, 5.2 x 3.3 cm
IES Mus. 4872, Addis Abäba



59. Neck cross, 15th–16th
century
copper, 3.5 x 2.5 cm
IES Mus. 5182, Addis Abäba



60. St Anthony of the Desert,
14th–early 15th century
fol. 137v, Psalter
Ambassäl, Wällo



61. Cross pendant,
15th century
obverse, 8.2 x 7 cm
Wuqēñ, Gäbrä'el, Tämben



63a. Cross pendant, late
15th–early 16th century
obverse, brass
Private Collection



62. Cross pendant,
15th century
reverse, 10.5 x 9 cm
Wuqēñ Gäbrä'el, Tämben



63b. Cross pendant, late
15th–early 16th century
reverse, brass
Private Collection



64. Gäbrä Şayon, Iyäsus
Mo'a, Zä-Iyäsus and Krastos
Täsfanä, 1400-1430
fol. 14v, Four Gospels Ms.
National Library, Addis
Abäba



65. St Andrew the Apostle,
14th-early 15th century
fol. 14v, Psalter,
Ambassäl, Wällo, Private
Collection



66. Saints John Chrysostom, Cyril, Saviros, Athanasius (first row) Theofil, Dioscurus, Basil (second row), late 15th century fol. 110v, Four Gospels Säwne Maryam, Agamä



67. Abunä Anoryos the Elder and Abunä Täklä Haymanot diptych (detail) Oxford, Juel-Jensen Collection



68. *Abunā Samu'el*,
15th–early 16th century
wall painting
Yäddabä Maryam, Dawnt in
Wällo



69. *Abunā Muse*, 15th–early
16th century
wall painting
Yäddabä Maryam, Dawnt in
Wällo

70. *Priests of Heaven* (first
row), 15th–early 16th century
wall painting
Yäddabä Maryam, Dawnt in
Wällo

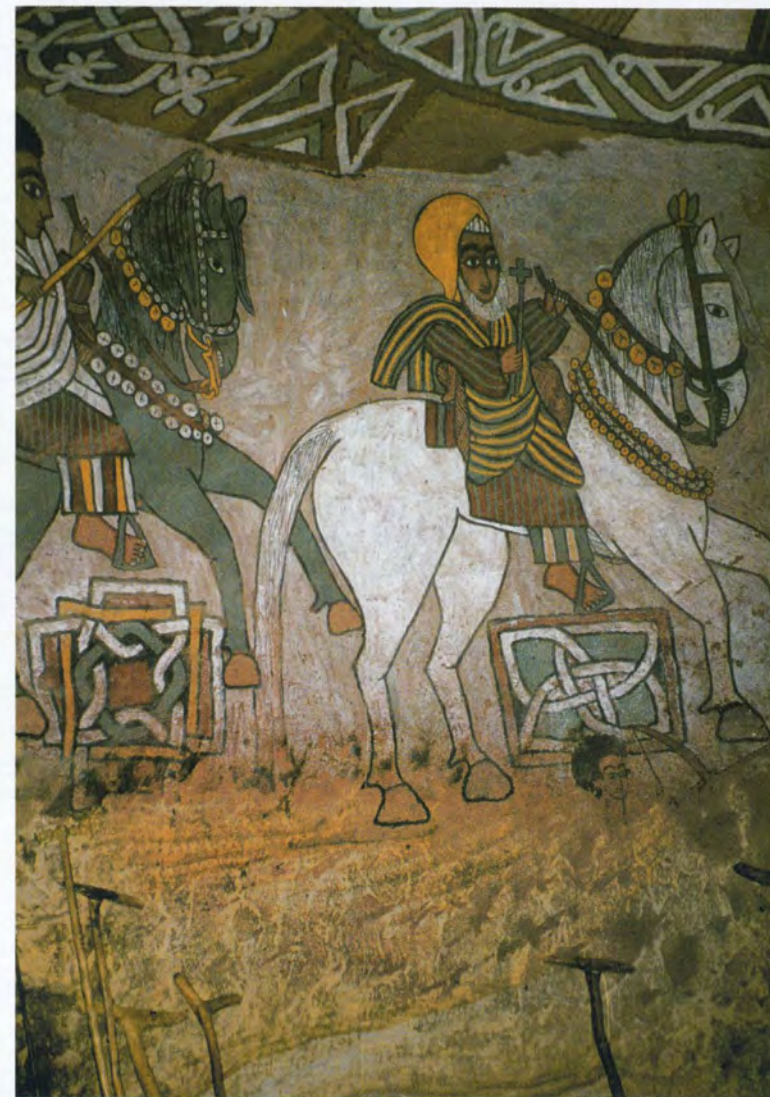


71. Priests of Heaven
(second row), 15th–early 16th
century
wall painting
Yäddäbä Maryam, Dawnt in
Wällo



72. Painted strip, 15th–early
16th century
Däbrä 3ṣṭifanos, Lake Ḥayq

73. Monk on Horseback,
15th–early 16th century
Abunä Yäm'atä of Guḥ,
Gär'alta



74. Hand cross, late 15th–16th century
brass with copper
incrustation, 37.5 x 15.24 cm
Tä'aminä Maryam, Tämben

75. *Abunä Ewostatewos*,
Abba Absadi, *Abba Filāpos*,
late 15th century
fol. 123v Acts of Ewostatewos
Däbrä Šārabi



76. *Abunä Tāklä Haymanot*,
Abunä Abib, *Abba Danʾel*,
late 15th century
fol. 123r Acts of
Ewostatewos
Däbrä Šārabi



77. Kʾələṣewon (on horse),
Təḥrayännä Maryam
(seated) and standing figure,
1270–1285
wall painting
Gännäta Maryam, Lasta



78. *Abunä Ewostatewos*, ca.
1480–1520
Nicolò Brancalon, Three
Saints, triptych (detail)
IES Mus. 4191, Addis Abāba



79. Hand cross, presumed to
have belonged to *Abba*
Gärima, 14th–15th(?) century
copper, 42 x 12 cm
Däbrä Gärima, Adwa Region



80a. Mary with her beloved
Son (engraving) hand cross,
mid-15th–early 16th century
slightly gilded silver,
32 x 16.5 cm
Däbrä Mädhānit, Tāmben



80b. Picture of Our Lord,
(engraving) hand cross, late
15th–early 16th century
slightly gilded silver,
32 x 16.5 cm
Däbrä Mädhānit, Tāmben



81a. Coloured drawing of a cross, late 15th–early 16th century
fol.(?), *Laḥä Maryam*,
Lament of Mary
Bärbär Maryam, Gomo,
Southern Ethiopia



81b. Coloured drawing of a cross, late 15th–early 16th century
fol.(?), *Laḥä Maryam*,
Lament of Mary
Bärbär Maryam, Gomo,
Southern Ethiopia



82. Processional cross with
the engraved image of
Christ's Transfiguration,
1434–1468
brass(?), 48.2 x 25.5 cm
Tä'aminä Maryam, Tämben



83. Processional cross, mid-
or late 15th century
brass, 34.4 x 21.5 cm
Qoqolo Yohannäs, ʾändärta



84. Processional cross with
the engraved image of the
Crucifixion, late 15th–early
16th century
silver, 35.5 x 22 cm
Dima Giyorgis, Goggam



85. Processional cross with
the engraved image of the
Apostles Peter and Paul,
15th century
copper, 48 x 35.3 cm
Gännätä Maryam, Lasta



86. Processional cross,
14th–15th century
bronze, 30 x 15 cm
Guduba Yohannäs, Tämben



87. Processional cross,
14th–15th century
bronze, 24 x 10.5 cm
Guya Täklä Haymanot,
Tämben



88. Processional cross,
14th–15th century
bronze, 33 x 23.5 cm
Dəngəlat Maryam, Təmben



89. Processional cross,
14th–15th century
copper(?), 41 x 25 cm
3nda Abba Şəhima, ʿ3daga
Arabi



90. Processional cross,
14th–15th century
copper(?), 41 x 25 cm
3nda Abba Şəhima, ʿ3daga
Arabi

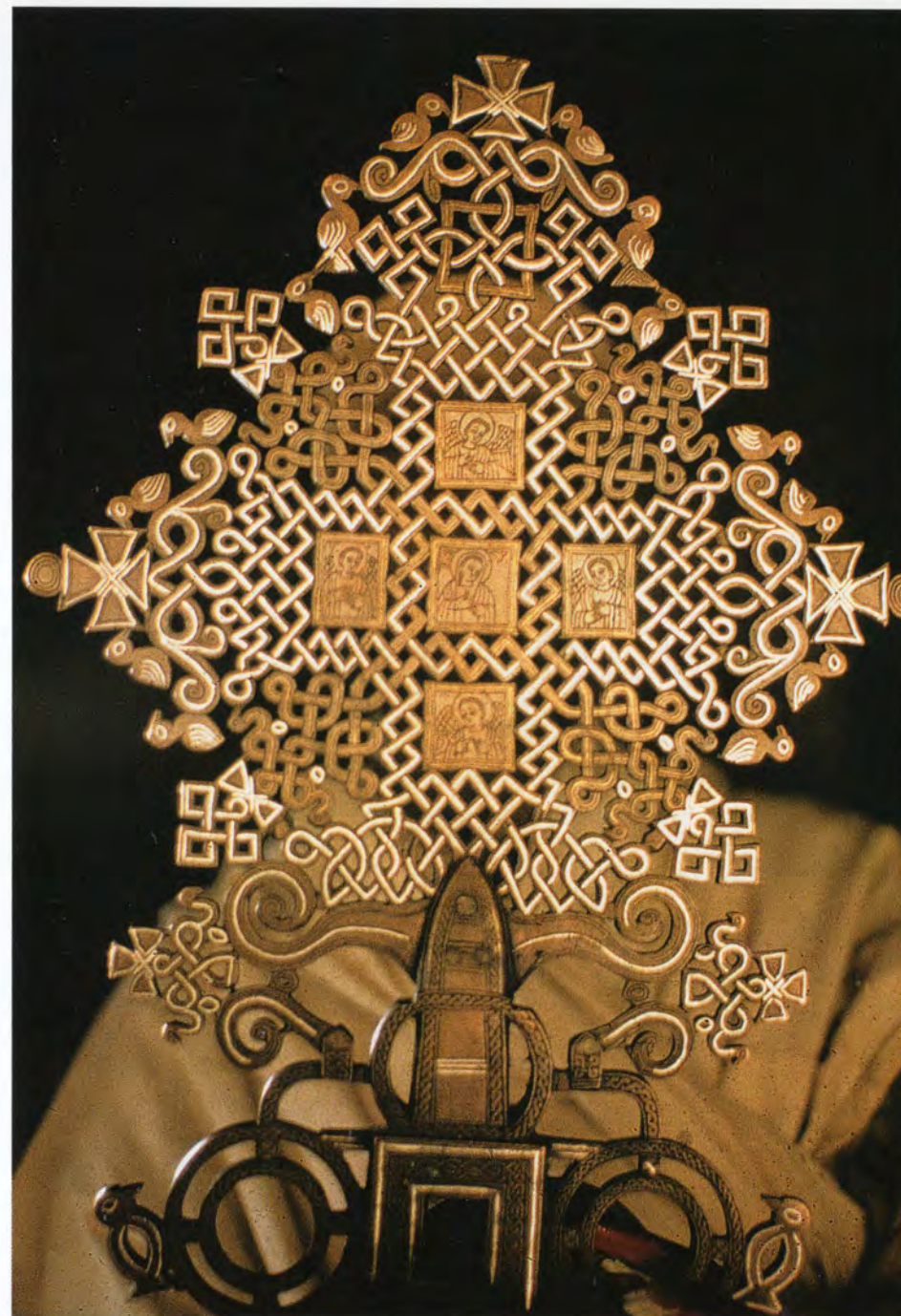


91. Processional cross, 15th century
copper gilded, 42 x 24 cm
Wuqēñ Gäbrä'el, Tämben

92a. Processional cross with
the engraved image of Christ,
mid- to late 15th century
brass, 33.4 x 24 cm
Wafa Iyäsus, G'änça, Eastern
Goğğam

92b. Processional cross with
the engraved image of Four
Evangelists, mid- to late 15th
century
brass, 33.4 x 24 cm
Wafa Iyäsus, G'änça, Eastern
Goğğam

93. Processional cross, mid-
to late 15th century
bronze(?) with silver
incrustation, 45.5 x 35 cm
Zena Marqos, Morät, Eastern
Šäwa



94. St Iyäsus Mo'a,
1280–1281
fol. 5v, Ms. of the Four
Gospels
Däbrä Hayq 3stifanos, Wällo

96. St Thomas Holding a
Staff Topped with a Cross,
late 15th–16th century
coloured drawing, fol. 15r,
Ms. of the Four Gospels
Däbrä Šärabi, 3ndärtä

95. St Matthew the Apostle,
14th–early 15th century
fol. 72v, Psalter
Ambassäl, Wällo, Private
Collection

97. St James and St John,
14th–early 15th century
fol. 64r, Psalter
Ambassäl, Wällo

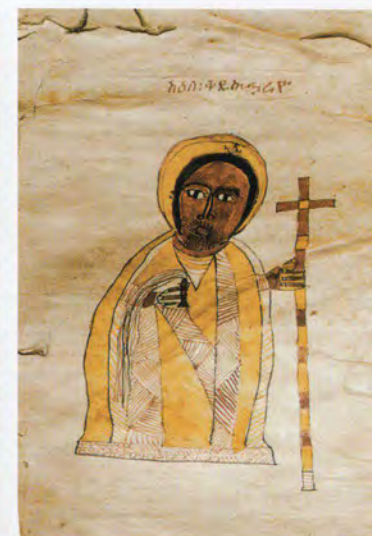
98. St Timothy, 15th century
miniature, fol. 6v, Psalter
Ora Mäsqäl Čärqos, Agamä

100. Two patée hand crosses
depicted on the back of a
triptych, late 16th century
IES Mus. 3672, Addis Abäba

99. St Hilary or *Haräyo*, 16th
century
coloured drawing on loose
folio

Ora Masqäl Čärqos, Agamä

101. Horn of the Ram (*qärnä
bäg'o*) cross depicted on the
back of diptych, mid- to late
17th century
IES Mus. 3892, Addis Abäba



102. *Abba Abäyod*,
late 16th–early 17th century
wall painting
Däbrä Asa, Tämben



103. Neck cross,
17th–18th century
copper alloy, 5.1 x 4 cm
IES Mus. 5808, Addis Abäba



104. *Abunä Gäbrä Mänfäs*
Qaddus, mid-16th century
triptych (side panel)
IES Mus. 3992, Addis Abäba



105. *Abunä Täklä Haymanot*
and *Abunä Ewostatewos*,
late 16th century
triptych (side panel)
IES Mus. 4001, Addis Abäba



106. The Twelve Apostles, late 16th–early 17th century wall painting
Däbrä Asa, Tämben

107. *Abba Yohanni*, late 16th–early 17th century wall painting
Däbrä Asa, Tämben



108. *Abunä Tāklä Haymanot* and *Abunä Ewostatewos*, 17th century wall painting
Däbrä Sina Maryam, Bāgemdār

109. Row of Saints, mid-17th century wall painting
Mā'aquddi Yohannās, Gār'alta



110. Liturgy cross, 17th
century
brass and iron, 32 x 10.5 cm
Konalä Däbrähayl, Tämben



111. Liturgy cross, 17th–18th
century
brass, 29.5 x 12.4 cm
3nda Šöllase, Adwa



112. Liturgy cross, 17th–18th
century
iron, 34 x 12 cm
Gənfał Šöllase, Tämben



113. Liturgy cross, 17th–18th
century
wood, 42 x 12 cm
Agobo Čärqos, Ašbi



114. Processional cross,
1667–1682
silver, 39.5 x 18.6 (broken)
Getesemane, G^oänča Valley,
Goğgam



115. Patée cross depicted
on the back of a panel, 18th
century
chain painting
IES Mus. 1349, Addis Abäba



116. *Abunä Täklä Haymanot* and *Abunä Ewoṣtatewos*, 1740–1755, triptych, centre panel IES Mus. 5976, Addis Abāba



117. *Abunä Täklä Haymanot* and *Abunä Ewoṣtatewos*, early 18th century triptych, left panel (detail) IES Mus. 3673–74, Addis Abāba



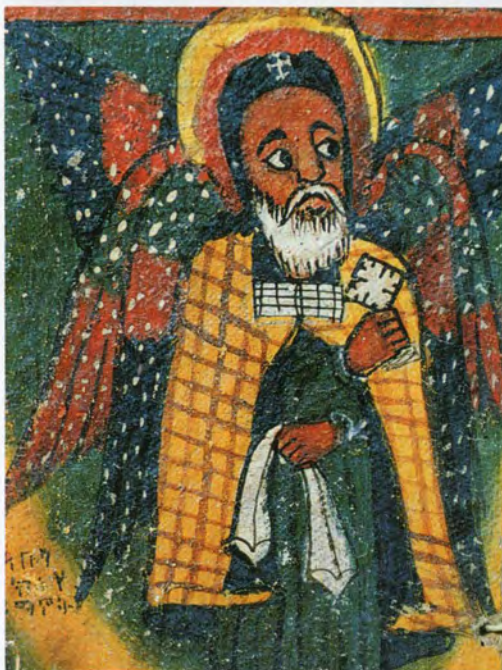
118. *Abunä Abib* and a Saint, 18th–19th century pendant double-face triptych (narrow side) IES Mus. 3795, Addis Abāba





119. Virgin Mary, Bishop Däqsəyos and False Bishop, early 18th century fol.(?), Miracles of Mary, Dämbäčča Mika'el, Goğğam

120. Abunä Täklä Haymanot, early 18th century triptych (right panel) IES Mus. 3979, Addis Abäba



121. Liturgy cross, ca. 1790–1816 wood, 59 x 17 cm Ruba K'isa Giyorgis, Tämben



122. Liturgy cross, 18th century wood, 63 x 20 cm Däbrä Şāhay Iyāsus, Haşbo, Aksum Region



123. Liturgy cross, 18th century(?) wood, 57 x 23 cm Däbrä Bānkol



124. Liturgy cross, 18th
century
wood, 49.5 x 13.3 cm
Ruba K^oisa, Tämben



125. Liturgy cross, 18th
century
wood, 33.5 x 16.5 cm
Agobo Čärqos, Aşbi



126. Processional cross, late
18th century
thinly gilded brass,
49.8 x 27.7 cm
IES Mus. 4345, Addis Abäba



127a. Engraved portrayal of
Məntəwwab, Processional
cross, ca. 1740
gilded brass, 61 x 42 cm
IES Mus. 4193, Addis Abäba



127b. Engraved portrayal of
Iyasu II, Processional cross,
ca. 1740
gilded brass, 61 x 42 cm
IES Mus. 4193, Addis Abäba



128. Processional cross with
engraved portrayal of *Ras*
Mika'el Səḥul, ca. 1769–1777
silver gilded, 49 x 31 cm
Däbrä Gärima, Adwa Region



129. Processional cross,
late 18th century
brass, ca. 60 x 31 cm
Wäynamä Kidanä Məḥrät,
Goḡgam



130. Processional cross,
18th century
wood with glass incrustation,
61 x 44 cm
Agobo Čärqos, Aşbi



131. Processional cross,
18th century
wood with glass incrustation,
57.5 x 37.4 cm
Dägu Maḥbär Şädqan,
Aksum Region



132. King David Bringing
the Tablet of the Covenant to
Jerusalem, early 18th century
fol. 8r, Psalter Ms.or. fol. 569
Staatsbibliothek Preußischer
Kulturbesitz, Berlin

ms or fol 596



133. Neck crosses for sale at
the market, 2004
Adwa, Təgray

134. Wife of a priest wearing
a diamond-shaped neck
cross, March 2004
Kiyazba K^oaqa, Tām̃ben



135. Woman wearing two neck crosses, March 2004
Ala'asa Mika'el, Tämben

137. Woman wearing three neck crosses, March 2004
3nda Iyäsus, Tämben



136. Woman wearing two neck crosses, March 2004
Addi Wäfärti Maryam,
Tämben

138. Girl at Lalibäla market
wearing two neck crosses,
18 November 2000



139. Girl wearing a copper
neck cross, March 2004
Säwne in Agamä



140. Farmer's wife wearing a
wooden neck cross, March 2004
Lake Ašängi

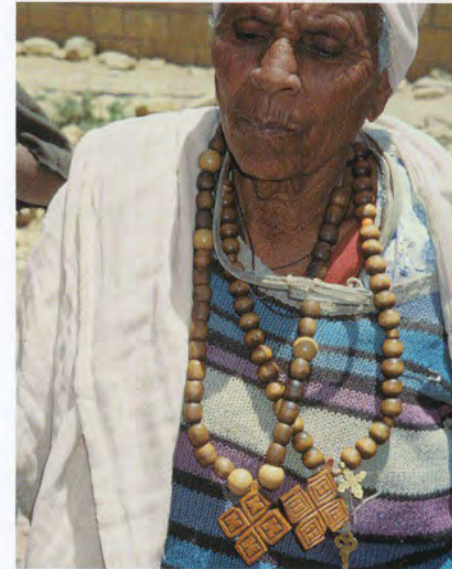




141. Girl wearing a neck cross bought at Mäqälä, March 2004
Amba Alaḡi

142. Elderly nun on pilgrimage wearing prayer beads with attached small wooden crosses, March 2004
Agula

144. Elementary school student wearing pendant cross, November 2001
Däbrä Wärq in Goḡḡam



143. Māmhar Täklä Maryam Abbot of Däbrä Maryam zä-Hayda wearing three crosses, 17 March 2004
Šire

145. Church school student wearing pendant cross, November 2001
Yä-Godana Mika'el in Goḡḡam





146. Priest carrying prayer beads and a hand cross, early 19th century triptych, central panel (detail)
Ala'asa Mika'el, Tämben

147. Seven Liturgy crosses, late 19th–early 20th century iron, brass and silver
Dəngəlat Maryam, Tämben

148. Liturgy cross, late 19th century silver gilded, 34.5 x 15 cm
Adwa Mädhane 'Alām



149. Abba Mälakä Şəge Täsfa holding priest's cross, mid-20th century brass, 24 x 9 cm
Wəndəgi Däbrä Şəge Maryam, Gəgəam



150. Māmhar Haylä Maryam holding priest's cross, early 20th century ca. 17 x 6.8 cm
Däy Giyorgis, Morät, Eastern Şäwa



151. Priest holding his cross,
late 19th century
brass
Adāt, Eastern Goġġam

152. Liturgy cross, 19th
century
wood, 25 x 10.4 cm
Gotara Kidanā Māhrāt,
Eastern Goġġam



153. Liturgy cross, 19th
century
wood, ca. 60 cm long
Tātāma Šəllase, Agamā



154. Processional cross, first
two decades of 19th century
silver gilded, ca. 50 cm long
Çäläqot Šəllase, 3ndarta



155. Processional cross, ca.
1885
silver gilded, 56 x 40 cm
3nda Səllase, Adwa



156. Processional cross, late
19th–early 20th century
silver, 30.5 x 22 cm
May Anbässa, 3ndorta



157. Processional cross,
1872–1889
wood, 52 x 30 cm
Tä'aminä Maryam, Tämben



158. Processional cross, ca.
1938
wood, 46 x 12 cm
May Aläqti Kidanä Məhrät,
Agamä



159. Čärqos church at Ora Mäsqäl, 19th century Agamä

161. Church, manuscript painting, 18th century Miracles of Mary Aksum Şayon Maryam

160. Church, manuscript painting, mid-17th century fol.(?), Miracles of Mary II Däbrä Waŕq' Gogġam

162. Church, manuscript painting, late 17th century fol. 49v, Miracles of Mary Gəmgabet Kidanä Məhrät, Däbrä Marqos in Gogġam



Crosses – particularly hand crosses – served not only for protective purposes but also as a medium for the working of miracles. The following examples refer to three 15th-century monks, but in hagiographic writings there are many such stories. One of these holy men was *Abba Habtä Maryam*, died 1497, a monk at Däbrä Libanos of Šäwa, who wrote a book on the Holy Trinity. He was also renowned for having spiritual conversations with Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary and the Archangel Michael, as well as the telepathic gift of communicating with people at a distance (Raineri 1990: 11–159). The second was *Abba Iyasu* of Ġar Šəllase, d.1508, a faithful companion and friend of Häbtä Maryam (Raineri 1990: 175–261) and the third was *Abba Märġä Krəstos*, Abbot of Däbrä Libanos between 1462 and 1496 (Kur 1972: 11–95).

In 1496, *Abba Habtä Maryam* sent *Iyasu* to Aše Na'od, 1494–1508, with a book which “Jesus Christ revealed to him”. Na'od had the book examined by a learned man at the court, who found it worthy of approval. The ruler was pleased, and gave *Iyasu* two crosses, one for Häbtä Maryam and the second for himself. The cross given to Häbtä Maryam was made of silver and he always carried it in order to protect himself against evil spirits. (Raineri 1990: 119). Presumably the cross given to *Iyasu* was also metal – probably brass. Na'od requested that both monks should remember him in their prayers (Raineri 1990: 233, 235).

Iyasu received another cross from a certain *Abba Märqorewos*, described in the text as “a great monk”. The cross was made of Ethiopian cedar (Raineri 1990: 183) and *Iyasu* treasured it since it was the medium for two miracles connected to dramatic events in his life.

The first occurred when *Iyasu* was returning to Däbrä Libanos and had to spend the night at the house of a woman whose husband was at the royal court. This woman tried to seduce the pious *Iyasu*. According to the story, *Iyasu's* companion came to his rescue and kicked the women in the chest with such force that she fell dead at his feet. Seeing this, *Iyasu* prayed for a miracle, whereupon Archangel Michael appeared and instructed him to touch the woman's face with his cross. Having done so, he was amazed to find that the woman came back to life (Raineri 1990: 233–237).

The second miracle took place after *Iyasu* had returned to the

monastery. When praying close to the brazier, he fell asleep with the cross in his lap. It fell unnoticed into the brazier. The next morning when he began to search for his cross, he found it intact in the brazier. This miraculous occurrence caused Iyasu to immediately fall on his knees and kiss the cross many times (Raineri 1990: 233, 235).

Iyasu used the same cross for curing a woman who had fallen in love with him. After being rejected, it is said that she became possessed by a demon in the form of a serpent. Iyasu blessed her with his cross, and instantly the demon was cast out (Raineri 1990: 233–237). The same cross also proved to be good protection against dangerous creatures. When Iyasu was living in great seclusion in Däbrä Libanos, a huge serpent attacked him. Iyasu displayed the cross and the snake fell dead at his feet (Raineri 1990: 245). Another miracle relating to crosses was witnessed by Märḥä Krastos. One night, while at prayer, he saw demons attempting to enter his room. To protect himself, he hung crosses in the window. The demons cleverly tied cloths around their heads because they knew of the dangers associated with touching a cross. This time, when they tried to enter, fire sprang forth from the crosses and the demons ran off with their heads on fire (Kur 1972: 21–22). Another such occurrence is recorded in the life story of *Abba* Isayas, who was the sixth abbot of the Gundä Gunde Monastery or Däbrä Gärzen at Kaswa from 1554 till his death in 1572. When Isayas was already old and blind, the Devil disguised as a human came to him, took his hands and shook him violently. Isayas recognised the Devil and immediately made the sign of the cross on the Devil's face. Overwhelmed, the Devil took to his heels and ran off (Ferenc 1976: 281).

A certain particularly holy cross in Aksum was believed to possess exceptional powers when presented for the purpose of veneration. In 1807, the British traveller Nathaniel Pearce noted that "people came from a great distance and paid a large sum to be allowed to kiss the cross, imagining that their sins are thereby washed away [by the "tears" from the cross]". Pearce himself believed that the cross was anointed with some oily substance, which when held in the sun, melted and shone like drops of water (Pearce 1831: 174–175).

Other crosses were believed to have had miraculous origins. In 1839, Théophile Lefebvre, leader of a French exploration party in Ethiopia, recorded the Egyptian prelate's official entry into Gondär. He was to become the Head of the Ethiopian Church and adopted the name of Sälama. Two rows of clergy advanced towards the new *abunä* and the chief priest offered him "the holy book" (undoubtedly the Gospels) to kiss, as well as several crosses which "as the Abyssinians say came miraculously from Heaven" (Lefebvre 1845: 30).

Another miraculous cross is still in existence at Däbrä Libanos. According to the observations of a German missionary, C.W. Isenberg, who visited the monastery in 1840, "the priests from the church say that many years ago the cross fell from Heaven." It was discovered by a monk who gave it to the church. And thus after having drunk from the miraculous well of Täklä Hymanot at the monastery, present-day pilgrims can proceed to the special chapel in order to kiss the miraculous cross (Krapf 1968: 246).

Miracles also occurred when people were attempting to cross flooded rivers. One such miracle was performed by the *ጌጃጃ* Bätträ Giyorgis who was Head of all monks during the reign of *Aṣe* Susnāyos, 1606–1632. When the ruler converted to Catholicism, Bätträ Giyorgis and a group of his adherents exiled themselves to Lasta, which was the stronghold of traditional faith. They were travelling during the rainy season and when they arrived at the Täckkäze River, they found it flooded. According to the text originating from the late 17th or early 18th century, with his cross Bätträ Giyorgis blessed the river which conveniently divided itself leaving all people and animals to cross in safety (Yaqob Beyene 1981: 29–30).

A similar miracle inspired by the Biblical story of Moses, was performed by *Abba* Ananya, Abbot of Däbra Šärabī, 30 kilometres north-west of present-day Mäqälä in Təgray. According to his *gädlä* or spiritual combat as well as the story of his life, which was probably written in the late 16th or early 17th century, he was travelling during the season of heavy rains and had to cross the swollen waters of the River Täckkäze. Imploring God for help and using his cross, Ananya blessed the river, which instantly divided

in two to permit a safe crossing (Lusini 1990: 160). Another miraculous occurrence involving a cross and a river was recorded by the Protestant missionary Johann Krapf. In May 1840, he was trekking from Zena Marqos to Däbrä Libanos along the bed of a dry river. Local inhabitants told the missionary that St Täklä Haymanot had cursed the river, because the water had carried away a cross which had fallen from his hand. The cross, however, was found at the mouth of the river, and because of this people believed the water in that place possessed miraculous qualities (Krapf 1968: 244).

One especially valued aspect of the power of the cross relates to its miraculous healing properties. Märhä Krastos, Abbot of Däbrä Libanos, used to dip his cross into water, or, as the chronicler puts it, to "wash" his cross. He would then offer the water, which people could either drink or use it to wash themselves, and in this way, it was said that his cross was responsible for curing them (Kur 1972: 68–69, 90).

A Jesuit missionary in early 17th-century Ethiopia, Gaspar Páez, observed a similar miraculous cure. It seems that a child on the verge of death was brought to a midwife who dipped a crucifix in water and gave some to the child who recovered immediately. Shortly after this first miraculous healing, the woman effected another cure on a baby, who was the victim of an accident (Lettere Annue 1628: 92).

In the late 1840s, the French traveller d'Abbadie mentions having taken part in the Amhara campaign against the Oromo living in the Blue Nile area, a region known for its many infestations during the rainy season, especially malaria. "It is customary," he wrote, "for most of the people to make a sign of the cross on their foreheads with a mixture of gunpowder and water to keep away evil spirits and djins, which bring the epidemic" (d'Abbadie 1980: II, 220).

Even today, the cross is extensively used by local healers and exorcists whose practices continue to evolve in response to the religious beliefs of the people and as part of the activity of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. One of the most renowned healers was Abba Wäldä Tənsay'e Gizaw, who practised in Wälisso from 1953 until his death in 1997. After reading the holy texts and giving a sermon, Abba Wäldä Tənsay'e would approach

a large basin filled with water brought from the local well. He would then pray over the water and pour a chrism into it, before immersing a wooden cross and slowly moving it. Using the consecrated water, Wäldä Tənsay'e would then treat the sick, the great majority of whom were apparently possessed by evil spirits. Water was poured over the afflicted and with his cross the healer touched either the head or the relevant parts of their bodies, requesting the demons to leave them. If the demons refused, he would douse the possessed persons with water and strike them with the cross (Kriss 1992: 71–75).

Certain specific crosses are believed to have miraculous properties. A silver processional cross named *ǝlaryo*, possibly Ablarius (Hilarius?) of the Synaxary (Budge 1928: 187–188) at Däbrä Bānkol in the Aksum region, is believed to be effective in solving various problems, particularly in averting drought (*fig. 16*).

In Däbrä Maryam zä-Hayda in Šire, the hand cross which belonged to Abunä Tomas, the founder of the monastery, plays an important role in the life of the community (*fig. 18*). When people quarrel, they go to the monastery and will be reconciled by the power of the cross. If anyone attempts to hide the truth, he or she could either become afflicted by illness or even insanity. The cross is also considered effective in finding thieves or murderers. Those under suspicion were required to come to the cross and swear on it. If the suspect confessed, the case was immediately settled by the miraculous intervention of the cross. According to the monks, this manner of settling such matters is still recognised by civil authorities. In the same monastery, the large broken hand cross of Abunä Färe Kahn, one of the local saints, is believed to have been brought from Jerusalem in the distant past. The cross is permanently kept in the monastery's grain storehouse in the belief that it will act as an instrument of protection (*fig. 164*).

Finally, the renowned *Näwa bäg'u* or "Behold the Lamb" cross at the Tädbabä Maryam Monastery in Wällo is believed to have the miraculous power of healing the blind (Spencer 1972: 73).

The Cross, *Matäb* and Tattoo as Signs of Christian Identity

Ethiopian Christians have long had three possibilities of visually expressing their faith. One was either to wear a cross around their

neck or carry one in their hands. The second possibility was to wear a *matäb* or a string around their necks, and the third to have a cross tattooed on their foreheads or temples.

Neck and Hand Crosses

Although 6th-century Aksumite coinage reveals the fact that the practice of carrying hand crosses was already established, it was not until the 15th century that the custom was first documented. The earliest known record in existence in foreign sources is a description by an Italian ecclesiastic Niccolò di Gagliano, a priest who encountered some Ethiopians in Rome in July or August of 1404 and noted that "as a sign of their Christian faith they always carry in their hands a small iron cross [which is] well polished" (Lazzarini 1924: 842). This information is corroborated by the Italian traveller Niccolò da Poggibonsi, who in his *Libro d'Oltremare* describing his visit to the Holy Land in 1347 mentions that Christians of Ethiopia passed into Egypt and the Holy Land without paying tribute to the Sultan and they were permitted to carry uncovered crosses through all Saracene lands (Munro-Hay 1997: 208–209). The small cross carried by Ethiopian pilgrims to the Holy Land was their distinctive mark. Although they travelled through the countries in which Christianity was either suppressed or proscribed, this special privilege of openly bearing crosses was explained by medieval writers as being granted because of the reputed might of Ethiopian rulers.

Turning to Ethiopian sources, according to a mid 15th-century description of the punishment inflicted on the dissident followers of the monk 3stifanos, besides stripping them of their monastic clothes and other belongings, they were also forced to relinquish their hand crosses (Getatchew Haile 1983: 113).

In the 16th century, during the six years he spent travelling in Ethiopia, Alvares observed that crosses were the visible signs of Christian allegiance. When the Portuguese landed in the port of Məşəwwa, monks came to welcome them from the great monastery of Bizän, situated on the high mountain located 100 kilometres from the coast. The monks appeared with a cross and the priests with surplices. They offered the Portuguese the cross to kiss, which they did with great reverence (Alvares 1961: 57).

When the Portuguese reached the royal camp, before receiving them officially, Ləbnä Dəngəl asked to be shown either a gold or silver cross, which he believed they must have in their possession. When they responded that they had no crosses of precious metals, the ruler requested that they show him any cross they might have with them. They sent the wooden cross with the crucifix painted on it, which Alvares always carried in his hand. "He [the king] sent it back at once," continues Alvares, "saying that he rejoiced much that we were Christians" (Alvares 1961: 280).

In his letter to King Manoel of Portugal, acknowledging the Embassy, Ləbnä Dəngəl expressed his special joy at seeing the Portuguese with crosses on their heads and breasts, and also in their hands (Alvares 1961: 498). The king was undoubtedly referring to the cross pattern on the helmets and breast plates of the Portuguese armour. Alvares noted that all priests, monks and people of high nobility carried crosses in their hands whether on foot or on horseback and the common laymen and lower members of society wore little crosses around their necks (Alvares 1961: 170, 516). For the priests the hand cross was a distinguishing mark because, according to Alvares, they "show very little difference from the laity in their dress . . . and the [only] difference is that they carry a cross . . ." (Alvares 1961: 126–127).

The importance of this custom is also well-illustrated by Abunä Marcos's decision in the case of a priest who confessed to having slept with a woman other than his wife. As punishment, the *abunä* "commanded him not to carry a cross in his hand, nor to enter a church . . . and to become a layman" (Alvares 1961: 120). It appears that on the one hand carrying the cross was a necessary part of the performance of a priest's function, while on the other hand it served as the mark of identification for adherents of the Christian faith.

The significance of priests' hand crosses (in priests' hands) is recorded by Remedius Prutky, a Catholic missionary from Bohemia, who spent several months in Ethiopia from 1752 to 1753, residing mostly in Gondär. "Monks are distinguished," he writes, "from [the] priests by the cowl, while priests are distinguished from the rest of the people by a cross of wood or metal borne in the hand" (Prutky 1991: 250).

The *Matäb*

The *matäb*, in Amharic *ma'ätäb* or sign in Gə'əz, is a single string or intertwined strings worn around the neck. It is considered by Ethiopians to be a sign of the Christian faith and is still widely used throughout the country. Local Church scholars created legends about its introduction into Ethiopia (Taddesse Tamrat 1959: 38–39). What is possibly the earliest record of the practice of wearing the *matäb* is found in the story of a fateful event which occurred during the reign of Aṣe Dawit II, 1380–1413. A certain Sabuh, an Arab prisoner who had been converted to Christianity for some time, “left his *matäb*, repudiated his baptism, and deserted the court”. He joined his Arab compatriots and returned to his old religion, but after seven years his own compatriots betrayed him and delivered him back to the Ethiopian ruler on the feast day of the Holy Cross (Raineri 1999: 375).

The Book of Light by Zär'a Ya'eqob also provides evidence that the *matäb* was in general use during his reign. The royal chronicles reveal that he was clearly against the custom. “The strings,” he wrote, “which the people in Ethiopia carry around their necks were not prescribed by the holy books” and he ordered that it be recorded that he regarded the tattoo of the sign of the Trinity as a “much better Christian sign than the string around the neck” (Conti Rossini 1965: II, 17). However, the story of the 15th-century followers of the dissident monk ʒṣṭifanos appears to suggest the opposite. They underwent severe persecution, particularly during the reign of Zär'a Ya'eqob. During a particularly gruelling session of inquisition, their opponents at the court ordered them to be stripped of their clothes, including their *matäbs*. Only a piece of the *askema* or scapular which consists of two bands of leather slung over the shoulder forming an “x” and sometimes interlaced with twelve small crosses was allowed to remain (Getatchew Haile 1983: 113).

It is an established fact that from the 17th century onwards the custom of wearing the *matäb* gained importance as a sign of the Christian faith and that its use became widespread. The missionary Prutky noted in 1752 this fact with the commentary: “Seeing that Christian Ethiopians live in a community which is mixed with Turks (i.e. Arabs), heathens, Jews and idolaters . . . it is impossi-

ble to know who is Christian, Jew, Turk or heathen, and when I asked a man of what faith he was, the Christian at once pointed to the cord at his neck, professing himself as a Christian, because the other sects do not have it” (Prutky 1991: 250).

In another passage, Prutky returns to the *matäb*, emphasising more forcefully its importance to Ethiopia's Christians. “Instead of making the sign of the cross in proper Christian fashion, they obstinately maintain and defend the position that it is the cord they wear that distinguishes them from other nations . . . Ministers and important officials of the empire and other rich men are none of them content with a small cord, but wear a bigger version made of multi-coloured silk, three fingers thick, which hangs from the neck to the chest. Nor does anyone dare to leave home without it, in the belief that in it resides the whole virtue of the Christian faith. They flatter themselves that in case of sudden death, the protection of this badge will ensure their sin-free passage to Heaven and that without it, their salvation is in danger” (Prutky 1991: 225–226).

Nineteenth-century travellers often mention the *matäb* in their writings. An early 19th-century French traveller, Rochet d'Héricourt, noticed a cord of blue silk around the neck of Nəguś Šahlä Šəllase of Šäwa. The king explained that this was a sign not only of his own Christianity, but that of his entire realm (Rochet d'Héricourt 1841: 142). Théophile Lefèbvre, a contemporary of Rochet d'Héricourt, also mentions a blue cord made of silk worn around the neck by Christians. The cord was made locally with thread imported from Syria (Lefèbvre 1848: III, 283). Still another French traveller of the same period, Arnauld d'Abbadie, described a baptism, during which the priest tied a cord around the child's neck. Its three colours were said to symbolise the Holy Trinity. D'Abbadie notes another significant detail in that he observed people carrying amulets attached to the *matäb* (d'Abbadie 1980: 68).

During the same period, Charles Johnson, a British traveller, gives his own detailed description of the *matäb*. Sometimes it consists merely of white or blue thread, but those in most general use are of dark blue silk thread. Some are ornamented with white and blue beads which are the most preferred by the Christians of Šäwa. He goes on to say that the dark blue thread which was once uni-

versally worn because it was considered the most orthodox was supplanted by white and yellow threads of beads (Johnson 1844: 164–165).

In the mid-19th century, British traveller Mansfield Parkyns corroborates d'Abbadie's information relating to the *matäb* in Təgre, and additionally explains that the priest during baptism places a plaited cord of red, blue and white silk around the child's neck. This cord was later exchanged for the customary blue one which was habitually worn by adults (Parkyns 1853: II, 39).

An early 20th-century British traveller, C.H. Walker, gave the particulars of two kinds of *matäb*. One is a short neck cord which is put around a baby's neck on the day of baptism. It was not necessary to have a blue cord as there are no strict rules about the colour or number of component threads. The priest would bless the cord by dipping it in holy water. It was of no consequence whether or not the cord had an object suspended from it, but at baptism, a tiny cross or ring of silver or gold might be hung from it (Walker 1933: 5–6).

A second kind of *matäb* was a long neck-cord made of four pieces of dark blue silk, which was worn by a youth when he reached puberty, and by a girl on the day of her marriage. The young man's cord was slipped over the neck and touched his navel, while the young woman's extended to her knees. On the long cord talismans were hung. These were enclosed in leather, with a seal and, at times, a ring and a pincer of iron to extract wax from the ears, or a thorn from the skin (Walker 1933: 18–22). Today, the *matäb* is still worn by men in Təgray. It is a narrow cotton cord of any colour which is sufficiently long to be hidden under the shirt.

Tattoos

Given the fact that Zär'a Ya'eqob was not in favour of the *matäb* or neck cord, he prescribed marking the "name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" on people's foreheads in accordance with the Revelation of St John 12, 3–4 (Conti Rossini 1965: II, 17). In practice, however, this was probably understood as marking the body with the sign of the cross. Zär'a Ya'eqob was undoubtedly aware of the Egyptian Coptic tradition of marking the sign of the cross on the right wrist (Muyser 1952: 23). This may have inspired

him to issue a further proclamation ordering people to place the sign of the cross on all their apparel, as well as on bells, walking sticks and weapons, and even on their ploughs and other implements. Also, the women were to mark the sign of the cross on any hand work since this was a symbolic means of warding off Satan (Conti Rossini 1965: I, 17–18).

It appears from Zär'a Ya'eqob's reference to the Copts of Egypt that he was suggesting the practice of tattooing, which they had used extensively during the first millennium of the Christian era (Muyser 1952: 21). It is a matter of conjecture when the practice of tattooing was first introduced in Ethiopia, but certainly it dates back many centuries. Branding a cross onto a Christian's forehead with a hot iron was another method of establishing an individual's religious identity. The expression "baptised with fire" used in a letter written by Niccolò di Gagliano in 1404 probably means that the three Ethiopians whom he met in Rome bore the brand of the cross on their foreheads (Lazzarini 1924: 842). In fact, the custom of making tattooed or branded signs of the cross on the forehead as well as various ornamental patterns on the neck is still common among the women in the Northern part of Ethiopia. The making of a similar incision with a razor, however, is mentioned in a recorded miracle performed by the Virgin Mary upon a certain Bätärgela Maryam, probably Aṣe Bā'ädä Maryam, 1468–1478. His father Zär'a Ya'eqob had commanded that his face must be incised with a razor so that the Virgin would guard him against any danger. Bätärgela Maryam was later incised for a second time after having survived a pestilence that ravaged the country (Getatchew Haile 1982: 51, 53). Unfortunately the text does not specifically identify the sign. However, given the established practices of the time, it was presumably that of the cross.

The long-standing tradition of tattooing continues in Ethiopia to this day. As a child, *Abba* Ḥaylä Maryam of Däbrä Gənfal Šəllase in Tämben had a cross incised with a Gillette razor on his forehead. The custom of women tattooing crosses either on their foreheads or hands, or on both, is still widely practised in Northern Ethiopia. Two seventh-grade girls in Haggärä Sälam in Tämben, Eleni Arägay (*fig. 19*) and ʒrgibe Asgäodom (*fig. 20*), each have different crosses tattooed on their foreheads.

The Relic of the True Cross

Among the relics most venerated by Ethiopians is a piece of wood believed to be part of the True Cross. This venerated object is presently safeguarded at Gišān Maryam in Wällo. According to traditions recorded in the Abbreviated Chronicle and *Māṣḥafā tǝfūt*, also the traditional chronicle, the sacred relic was brought into Ethiopia during the reign of Dawit II, but it was subsequently lost. Finally it was recovered by Zār'a Ya'əqob, who deposited it at Gišān Amba (Basset 1881: 95, 101; Caquot 1955: 100–101).

There are no records relating to the transfer of the relic of the True Cross to Ethiopia in Western European sources (Lazzarini 1924: 843). There are, however, detailed records of a delegation sent by Dawit II to Venice in 1402 and headed by the Italian Antonio Bartoli for the purpose of obtaining craftsmen for Ethiopia. Moreover, the decision of the Supreme Council to accept the royal request is also on record (Conti Rossini 1927: 88). There is, unfortunately, no mention of the relic whatsoever.

Only recently has an Ethiopian text come to light in Gondär which provides a detailed description of how a delegation headed by Bartoli was sent by Dawit with a specific request to the Doge of Venice for this holy relic. The request was evidently granted and the True Cross passed through Egypt and subsequently reached Ethiopia thanks to the good offices of Matthew, the Patriarch of Alexandria. In addition, the text provides a detailed list of the gifts sent to Ethiopia by the Supreme Council of Venice on this occasion (Raineri 1999: 367–377). This 20th-century copy of a hitherto unknown and potentially dubious text suggests the possibility of an existing documentation of the safe return of a 1404 delegation to Venice and sheds some light on the traditionally accepted version of the arrival of the True Cross in Ethiopia.

The Cross, however, carved from a piece of the Holy Cross, is known to have existed in Ethiopia, and in 1514 it was offered by Ləbnä Dəngəl to King Manoel of Portugal, 1495–1521. In 1514, the Ethiopian ruler's envoy, an Armenian named Matthew, handed the Cross to the Portuguese sovereign. In 1522, Manoel's successor, King John III, donated this Cross to the newly-elected Pope Adrian VI. After this there are no records about the whereabouts of this relic (Boavida 2004: 146–149).

There is also a distinct possibility that the relic of the True Cross obtained by Aṣe Dawit only survived the burning and looting of Gišān Maryam by the Adal invaders in 1533 because it was kept in a different place. However, the first firm documentation relating to it refers to events in the early 18th century. According to the text of the royal chronicle of Aṣe Iyasu I, 1682–1706, in the late 17th and early 18th century, the relic of the True Cross was kept at the royal oratory. On 9 September 1703, on the vigil of *Mäsqäl*, the feast of the True Cross, Iyasu ordered the venerable relic to be brought to him. The ruler is purported to have risen from his throne and kissed the Cross, which was then carried in a solemn procession of clergy and dignitaries to the main square of Gondär, where it remained for the duration of the festivities. The following day, Iyasu went to the square and the priests "raised the Cross from the earth", performed the ceremony of the exaltation of the Cross and then carried it back to the Imperial palace in a procession (Guidi 1954: 237). The relic continued to be kept in the royal enclosure in a special chapel believed to have been established during the reign of Dawit III, 1716–1720 (Munro-Hay 2002: 139).

Similarly in 1730, in the time of Iyasu II, 1730–1755, again on the vigil of the feast of *Mäsqäl*, on 27 or 28 September, the clergy of the royal oratory went in a procession to the tower called *Tädla* or Tower of Pleasure. They took the "wood of the Cross", and brought it to the main square of Gondär where the age-old ceremony of the burning of the *dämära* was to be performed, and the pyre constructed for the celebration of *Mäsqäl* (Guidi 1954: 34).

In March 1744, Iyasu II undertook a disastrous military expedition against the kingdom of Sennar, taking with him the True Cross and the venerated image of Christ Crowned. During the hasty retreat of Iyasu's troops, the relic and the image were captured by the enemy. In the ensuing negotiations, the Ethiopians were forced to pay a heavy ransom in exchange for these revered objects. To this end, a special tax was imposed on the populace and eventually the relics were returned (Guidi 1954: 124–125). The 18th-century Scottish traveller James Bruce claimed that the ransom was 8,000 ounces of gold (Bruce 1813: II, 642).

Ten years later Prutky observed, with a somewhat critical eye, the annual celebration of the feast of the True Cross. The rel-

ic was brought from the royal palace by a representative of the king, who was, himself, too ill to take part in the ceremony. The royal designate, accompanied by many other dignitaries – each with a large retinue – then embarked on a tour of all the churches of Gondär before returning to the square, where the True Cross was prominently displayed (Prutky 1991: 259–261).

At some later date, the True Cross was apparently returned to Gišän Maryam and is reputed to have remained there to this day. Diana Spencer, a British traveller, was assured of this fact by the priests at Gišän Maryam when she visited the Monastery there in 1967 (Spencer 1967: 103). The place where the relic is kept is marked by a stone with Mediterranean-style carvings characteristic of 15th-century remnants of buildings in Ethiopia (Spencer 2003: 38, 49–53).

Despite the long-standing tradition of the True Cross and its veneration, certain factions within the Church hierarchy were strongly opposed to the veneration of the Cross. The 16th-century ecclesiastic Baḥrey, known as the author of the History of the Galla or *Zenahu lägalla*, composed the following:

*“There are those who say to us, ‘Do you worship a creature,
And celebrate a feast to a piece of wood of the wilderness?’
The Cross is high above all things;
We say to them,
‘When Christ was crucified at noon,
Did he not sanctify it with his honoured blood?’”*

These words reflect the schism which had developed as early as the 13th century. During the reign of Yägbə’ä Šəyon, 1285–1294, a great controversy emerged because certain members of the clergy were adamant in their opposition to acts of veneration: “We will not prostrate ourselves to the cross nor to the icon [of Mary] because an icon is but a tablet and the cross a piece of wood from Golgotha” (Getatchew Haile 1983: 102).

Two centuries later the problem had not entirely been resolved and criticism of veneration once again came to the fore when a dissenting group in the North of the country under the fervent leadership of the monk Ʒstifanos (Taddesse Tamrat 1968: 106–111) opposed the position held by the official Church. In his writings, Zär’a Ya’əqob, the zealous proponent of maintaining and

strengthening Church traditions, accused them of refusing to prostrate themselves before the Cross (Conti Rossini 1965: I, 28; Wendt 1962: 24) and they were fiercely persecuted. The negative attitude towards them persisted for some time and found its expression in the derogatory designation of *däqiqä əstifa*, meaning children of an evil spirit (Getatchew Haile 1983: 94). A degree of accommodation must have occurred, however, before the arrival of the Portuguese in 1520, because we learn from the Acts of the monk Ʒzra – a highly regarded əstifanosite leader and founder of its main Gundä Gunde monastery in Agamä – that an attempt at reconciliation was made by Na’od, the grandson of Zär’a Ya’əqob. Ʒzra was called to his court and he and his companions were shown the icon of the Virgin and an image of the Cross to test them. They immediately prostrated themselves before both (Caquot 1961: 104–105). Possibly they did this as a sign of their submission to the ruler. However, their true purpose is an unresolved matter of conjecture (Beylot 1970: 107). In any case, it was a commonly held belief that the greater the number of prostrations, the greater the certainty that the prayers of the faithful would be heard and answered accordingly.

It appears that Ʒzra’s stay at the court of Na’od brought temporary relief to the internal strife between the official Church and the dissenting faction. However, twenty years later Alvares recorded having heard reports about this same on-going disagreement. He also mentions that he met with monks belonging to the dissident group and was even offered an explanation of their position. They declared themselves to “have only one cross to adore, and that it is that on which Jesus Christ suffered” (Alvares 1961: 170). A somewhat bewildered Alvares also noted that the followers of Ʒstifanos made precisely the same “crosses [presumably carved from wood] which every cleric and monk carries in his hands, and the laity at their necks”. The dissenters’ justification, however, was that these crosses were not to be regarded as objects of veneration, because they were the work of men’s hands (Alvares 1961: 170).

In any event, Ʒzra’s lengthy and favourable sojourn at the king’s court from 1499 to 1508 was a turning point in the history of the opponents of veneration (Taddesse Tamrat 1972: 209) and

the *əstifanosite* movement was eventually completely absorbed by the mother Church (Getatchew Haile 1983: 111).

The Crucifix

Alvares writes that "although there are, in the churches, figures painted on all the walls, and also crosses, nevertheless on no cross is a crucifix painted, neither have they any solid carvings" (Alvares 1961: 516). He is certainly correct in stating that there were no representations of the objects in the existing round churches of Ethiopia. There are, however, high relief figures cut from the rock in the Golgotha Church in Lalibäla. In his *History of Ethiopia*, the 17th-century German scholar Hiob Ludolf states emphatically that "as far as statues are concerned, whether graven or cast, they [Ethiopians] abominate them with the same antipathy as they do idols . . . And therefore it is a hideous offence for anyone to carry about them the picture of Christ crucified" (Ludolf 1982: 228). Remedius Prutky and Charles Poncet, a French physician, both of whom were 18th-century travellers in Ethiopia, also refer to the peoples' objection to the carved images in the churches (Prutky 1991: 262; Foster 1949: 139). Although generally the graven image of Christ does not appear on Ethiopian neck, hand or processional crosses, this does not signify a particular opposition to the crucifix on the part of Ethiopians. This is indicated by the fact that they did not voice any objections when the Portuguese displayed their own crucifix, which they carried on a staff during the first encounter in Məṣəwwa with the monks from the Monastery of Bizän, who went on board the Portuguese ship and kissed the cross with great reverence (Alvares 1961: 57). The Portuguese also showed Ləbnä Dəngəl the Holy Communion wafering irons "in which an image of the Crucifix was very plain and very well made" and the ruler was very pleased (Alvares 1961: 289–290).

On the other hand, Alvares himself admits to some exceptions to the general rule. During Holy Week in 1523 at midday on Good Friday, the Ethiopians decorated the church with hangings, most of which were suspended before the main entrance. "Before the door they put a paper crucifix on the hangings, that is to say, moulded, and above it a small curtain, with which it is covered." On Saturday, they drew the curtain from the crucifix. At the sight

of it, the people gave way to the most violent lamentation (Alvares 1961: 396–397). The expression "paper crucifix" probably meant that the figure had been moulded from a very fine hide. Such objects, however, were neither preserved nor mentioned in other written records.

Yet, in 1624, when the Jesuit missionary Manoel de Almeida brought a gift from Goa to Susnəyos, "what comforted me above all," he relates, "was the great piety, reverence and devotion with which he received the beautiful crucifix, that I presented to him in a rich casket from India" (Beckingham 1954: 190). It is true that at that time Susnəyos had already converted to Catholicism. Nevertheless, when in 1699 Charles Poncet presented an embossed crucifix to Iyasu I, he, too, was well pleased and kissed the figure with great devotion (Foster 1949: 139).

Augustus Wylde, a British soldier and traveller who in 1887 spent several weeks in Adwa and frequented the shop of *Näggadras* Mär'əd, the royal jeweller of Aṣe Yoḥannes, 1872–1889, had noticed in Mär'əd's house numerous crucifixes in which he found "some of the representations of our Saviour grotesque in the extreme" (Wylde 1889: II, 287).

It appears, therefore that the actual crucifixes were known and acceptable to Ethiopians. Furthermore, the *Näwa bag'u* cross treasured at Gišan Maryam is, in fact, a reliquary with a crucifix inside (Spencer 1972: 72). In spite of the fact that this is a crucifix, this cross has always been an object of veneration.

In several churches in Təgray and Goḡḡam provinces, crucifixes of foreign origin are still respectfully preserved. There is no objection to their form or to the fact that they mostly originate from the time of the 1936–1941 Italian occupation (*fig. 165*). Finally, the goldsmiths of Addis Abäba currently produce great numbers of small golden crucifixion crosses which are specifically intended for their affluent Ethiopian or European clientele.

There is virtually no detailed information relating to the materials and techniques used in the making of crosses. However, the following rare selected passages are offered without any presumption at having covered the subject in more than a cursory fashion. Although as a rule the production of Ethiopian crosses is anonymous, a few bear inscriptions revealing the name of the person who created the cross.

Ethiopians used various materials for making crosses, some of which were obtained locally, such as gold, iron, wood and grass, while others, including silver and bronze were imported. The possibility that silver was locally produced has been advanced from certain quarters, though without any conclusive evidence. In the mid- to late 15th century, bronze ceased to be used and it was gradually replaced by brass. Basically there were two methods of making crosses. One was the lost wax method which was generally applied for the production of processional crosses and, in general, bronze was the preferred material for this purpose. Moreover, the same method was occasionally used for making large hand crosses.

Initially the form of the cross was shaped out of wax. This was then completely covered in fine soft clay. At the top and bottom, two channels were left open. Once the clay was thoroughly dried, it was heated and the melted wax ran out leaving only the clay form. Molten metal was then poured into the mould and allowed to set. In order to extract the cross, the mould had to be broken. When the emerging surface of the cross was still rough, it had to be smoothed by chiselling. The crosses produced by this method were generally thick, up to 8 millimetres for the oldest crosses, but by the 14th and 15th centuries the crosses tended to be considerably thinner, measuring roughly 4 millimetres.

The second method of making crosses was by hammering them from a sheet of metal. The material used was mostly iron, occasionally copper and – beginning in the 15th century – generally brass. The form of the cross was delineated on a sheet of beaten metal, after which it was cut out and chiselled. The crosses made

from more malleable materials than bronze became much thinner, some reaching a thickness of only a little over 1 millimetre.

This, in turn, brought about changes in the methods of production whereby the main body of the cross was made separately from the shaft and the supporting lower arms were joined to it, usually either by welding or slotting. The crosses thus produced were more fragile than those made from bronze or by the lost wax method. Over the course of time, these crosses tended to break and periodically required repairs. The surfaces of crosses were generally ornamented with engravings, while silver or copper incrustation was applied in the case of some early crosses. Apparently granulation ornamentation first appeared during the early 18th century.

In the past, locally made iron knives were used for making wooden crosses and, in general, files were utilised for smoothing the surface. Soft wood was sometimes polished with leaves which had a rough surface. During the late 19th century, however, imported tools began to be used to a greater extent.

Grass

The earliest reference to the use of grass for making crosses is in *māṣḥāfā bərhan* or the Book of Light by Zār'a Ya'eqob. He prescribed common prayers at midday, and for the observance of this, the image of the Virgin Mary and the cross were displayed together in an elevated place. The cross could be made of iron, but if this was not available, the king recommended that the people "take a piece of wood or grass" and make a cross from it (Conti Rossini 1965: II, 2). The "grass" was either a reed of the type from which the Ethiopians make small crosses and wear them tied onto their foreheads at Easter or it could also be a kind of *Gramineae* which Ethiopian women use for making baskets. Crosses made of palm leaves are also mentioned in the Acts of Mārḥā Krəstos on the occasion of his incident with the demons (Kur 1972: 21).

Leather

Leather was another material used for making crosses. For example, a monk's scapular with its two (*fig. 23*) out of traditionally twelve integrated crosses was made from strips of leather interlaced to form small crosses. Also, leather hand crosses (*fig. 21*) as

well as neck crosses are known to be in use today. Finely crafted crosses were made from narrow leather strips skilfully plaited and twisted to form the shape of a cross. A thin layer of linseed oil was rubbed into the leather to make it supple and durable (*fig. 22*). Whenever the cord for pendant crosses is made of leather, several very thin strips are woven together. These, too, are very strong and long-lasting.

Another method for the production of leather crosses is to cut two or more shapes of crosses from a leather sheet, then glue them together and apply a cold press over an ornamental pattern (*fig. 24*). In the past, there is evidence that leather crosses were also used by Copts in Egypt and worn by priests and monks (Ludwig 1980: nos. 7, 9).

Wood

One of the earliest written records relating to crosses made of wood is found in a letter from the Ethiopian queen, Eleni, who wrote to King Manuel of Portugal, 1495–1521, regarding the donation to him of a wooden cross (Alvares 1961: 2–3; Boavida 2004: 146–149). In her letter, she mentions a piece of wood which she obtained from Jerusalem and which she believed to be a part of the True Cross on which "Our Lord was crucified". She reveals that she has had two crosses made out of it and writes that one cross "is black and has a little silver ring attached to it" (Sergew Hable-Selassie 1974: 557). There are two drawings of this cross in Portugal, one of which is apparently life-size (Boavida 2004: 148).

A miracle involving *Abba Iyasu* of Ġar Šəllase (Raineri 1990: 233, 235) also indicates that wooden crosses – some with carvings on them – were used by monks. Travellers and chroniclers rarely mention wooden crosses. However, it may be assumed that they were a common sight in the past. Alvares, the renowned observer of 16th-century life in Ethiopia, writes that hand and neck crosses were made by the monks for their own use (Alvares 1961: 170, 516) and presumably these crosses were made of wood.

The tree, *Dalbergia melanoxylon*, designated African Ebony, grows profusely in Northern Ethiopia. In his records, the Jesuit missionary Manoel Barradas, who lived in Ethiopia from 1624 to 1632, wrote that "some black wood can be found growing in the

forests, but in no sufficient quantity to be used for trade; nor is it as fine as the wood of Mozambique, though it is found along the same coastline. This can be seen from crosses that are made from it, which the priests, clergy and other people usually carry in their hands or wear on their necks or arms . . ." (Barradas 1996: 105).

James Bruce, the Scottish traveller who visited Ethiopia between 1768 and 1773, observed that in Adwa during the feast of Epiphany three wooden processional crosses were carried by priests dressed in their sacerdotal vestments (Bruce 1813: V, 11). Although the use of wooden crosses was later noted by British soldier Nathaniel Pearce in a reference which was specifically limited to the historic Təgre Province (Pearce 1831: 306), it was certainly widespread throughout the country. The wooden crosses were generally carved out of *wänza* or *Cordia africana*, but the harder varieties of wood such as *wäyra* or *Olea africana*, the antelmintic tree, *kosso*, or *Hagenia abyssinica*, and various kinds of acacia trees were also used.

The earliest existing large hand crosses with engraved or painted religious subjects are ascribed to the 15th century, while during the 17th and 18th centuries some very large wooden processional crosses are known to have been adorned with an incrustation of pieces of cut glass.

Iron

Iron objects have frequently been unearthed during archeological excavations. The majority are simple agricultural tools, equipment, or weapons. "It would seem likely," writes Stuart Munro-Hay, "that South Arabia and the Meroitic kingdom both had some influence on the development of ironworking in the country. The Aksumites evidently added to their own ironworking by importing some items ready-made and perhaps forged others from imported Indian iron. Small pieces of slag were found in several places during the excavations, but no other evidence has been found which might demonstrate ironworking at Aksum" (Munro-Hay 1989: 221). French scholar, Francis Anfray, however, is of the opinion that the use of iron metallurgy was introduced into Ethiopia at some point between the 3rd century B.C. and 1st century A.D. (Anfray 1967: 50).

Deposits of iron ore were evidently found in many parts of

the country and ironware was produced extensively. Extracted in a manner requiring many hours of toil and large quantities of charcoal, the final product was of mediocre quality. Nevertheless it appears that the output was sufficiently large to produce simple agricultural implements and various kinds of crosses. *Nəguś Šahlä Šəllase* of Šäwa had a large smelting facility close to Angoläla which produced substantial quantities of iron. It is unusual, therefore, that an early 19th-century French traveller, Rochet d'Héricourt, who visited Šäwa, in his list of the objects which could be fashioned out of iron, makes no mention of crosses (Rochet d'Héricourt 1841: 162). Also Lefèbvre, head of the French scientific mission from the 1830s through the 1840s, fails to mention crosses in his very detailed list of objects produced by Ethiopian craftsmen (Lefèbvre 1845-48: III, 255-256). Given that blacksmiths and potters were traditionally held in low repute and constituted a kind of hereditary caste, whose members were not permitted to receive the sacrament as Christians (Pearce 1831: 286-287), this might be a possible explanation for the omission of crosses in these lists.

Conversely, the Acts of Märhä Krəstos offer information on the making of iron crosses in the 15th century. It mentions that young Märhä Krəstos and his spiritual father once went to a blacksmith to order a cross. They found the blacksmith at work and his son blowing on the fire to keep the coals burning (Kur 1972: 10). The material used was undoubtedly iron.

According to Ethiopian sources, besides wooden crosses, monks also carried iron crosses. They also used iron staffs with a cross piece at the top or *bəträ mäsqäl* as walking sticks and they planted them in the ground while they prayed or preached (Mercier 2001: 48). Barradas, in his description of Təgre, wrote that "in various parts of the realm, much of good quality iron is found, from which they make swords, daggers and spearheads (Barradas 1996: 24). He does not, however, make any mention of the manufacture of crosses.

Despite the fact that he failed to include iron crosses on his list, when Rochet d'Héricourt joined *Nəguś Šahlä Šəllase* in his punitive campaign against the Gurage people who lived in the south-west of the kingdom, he noted that the priests who accom-

panied the king carried iron crosses in one hand and church paraphernalia in the other (Rochet d'Héricourt 1846: 181).

The production and use of these crosses certainly continued throughout many centuries, but this fact is rarely recorded by visiting travellers. One exception to this is Powell-Cotton, an early 20th-century British traveller, who expressly mentions four small iron crosses that he bought from a curio dealer in Addis Abäba for a "whole piece of salt" (Powell-Cotton 1902: 210).

The practice of gold, silver or brass inlay on iron or copper crosses probably evolved in the 12th–13th century and it appears to have flourished in the 14th and 15th century. A reproduction of a staff topped with a cross and ornamented with brass inlay in the church of Mika'el on Amba Dära was published by Claude Lepage who tentatively dated it to the 13th–15th century (Lepage 1975: 76). Of particular importance is the information on Adwa, a renowned centre for silversmiths, which was provided by British traveller Augustus Wylde, who frequented their shops in the late 19th century and learned about their craft. They evidently had maintained the art of ornamenting iron crosses with a design inlaid in gold or copper. In fact, before Wylde's departure, the merchants in the town presented him with an iron cross with the image of the Holy Trinity inlaid in gold as a sign of their gratitude. According to Wylde, the art of metal inlay "had nearly died out . . . there being only one workman in Adwa able to do it, and some few at Gondär and other big towns". Wylde also describes in detail the rather crude implements used by the gold and silversmiths. Yet, in spite of this, they were still capable of producing very fine ornamentation (Wylde 1889: I, 288). This art form is attested to by a few early iron crosses with copper or brass inlay still preserved in some monasteries as well as in private and public collections. Iron crosses are also depicted in 16th- through 19th-century paintings in which saints are often shown carrying these sacred objects. The artists painted them using black to denote the fact that they were made of iron as opposed to silver. Gold was suggested by the use of yellow.

Bronze and Brass

Considering that only one word, *nähas*, is used for both bronze and brass in Ethiopic as well Amharic, reference to local written

sources is not always helpful. Archeological excavations have, however, provided some information pertaining to the subject. During their reconnaissance in the Agamä region in 1955 and 1956, the French researchers, Jean Leclant and André Miquel, found in the site referred to as Sabea a deposit of bronze bracelets which were strongly oxydised. Their total weight was 23 kg, and some bore identification marks. In addition, a butcher knife and other objects also made of bronze (Leclant 1959: III, 112, pls. LVII–LVIII) were unearthed.

The 1959 excavations undertaken by Henri de Contenson in Häwälti yielded a similarly large number of bronze objects (Contenson 1963: V, 48–49, pl. LIII), while the results of the digging at Yəḥa were particularly abundant and included a variety of bronze objects (Anfray 1963: V, 180–181, pls. CXLVII–CLIV). These discoveries induced Francis Anfray to suggest that between the 3rd century before and the 1st century after the birth of Christ bronze metallurgy was relatively well developed (Anfray 1967: 50).

Copper

In the 17th century, Barradas was probably the first foreign traveller to mention copper being used for making crosses, and he recorded the fact that the high-ranking clergy of certain monasteries carried ornamented copper crosses (Beccari 1912: 169).

Silver

The possible existence of silver mines in the vicinity of Aksum (Pankhurst 1968: 227–228) has never been clearly established and it may, therefore, be reasonably assumed that the production of silver crosses depended entirely on the importation of this metal from other sources. Nor do they appear to have been produced in large numbers. Alvares observed that Aṣe Ləbnä Dəngəl had a silver cross and that he himself had received a silver cross from the Ethiopian sovereign as a farewell gift (Alvares 1961: 303). And later, Manoel Barradas writes about the ornamented silver hand crosses carried by clerics of high stature in the monasteries (Beccari 1912: 160). The Maria Theresa dollar or thaler seems to have first come to Ethiopia at the end of the 18th century and their quantity continued to increase throughout the following century. After

the arrival of the British expedition in 1868 and during the ensuing decades, vast numbers of the silver Maria Theresa coins were introduced into the country (Pankhurst 1968: 468–470). Many of them were employed for the production of crosses.

Gold

Golden crosses are often mentioned in royal chronicles and other Ethiopian sources, but it is difficult to assess how much of this is merely hagiographical phraseology and how much has a relationship with reality. On reading that the chief priest of Atronsä Maryam, the royal church in Amhara Province, was granted the privilege by Aṣe Bä'ädä Maryam of being accompanied by twelve golden crosses (Bartnicki 1987: 90), legitimate doubts can be expressed about the veracity of such a claim. Was this not, one wonders, simply a case of blatant exaggeration in order to justify a position of precedence over other churches in the region?

Chihab-eddin Aḥmad 'Abd el-Qader, Arab chronicler of the disastrous Adal invasion in the late 1520s and throughout the 1530s, writes on two occasions about "red gold" crosses and makes reference to the golden rim of the roof of the Bädeke Church in Amhara Province (Basset 1897: 215). He also mentions the golden and silver crucifixes in the treasury of Ḥayq ʾIstifanos Monastery in Wällo. They were so numerous that it would take a hundred men to carry them (Basset 1897: 377). The descriptive term "golden" may, in fact, have been an overstatement. Hence, anything that shines might have been described as "golden", although the object could well have been made of copper or brass. It is significant that during the early 18th century some royal crosses as well as those belonging to the nobility were adorned with a fine gold overlay. This would scarcely have been the case if the metal itself were already a rarity (Munro-Hay 1991: 172).

In the late 1800s, Augustus Wylde was greatly impressed by the roofing of the church of ʾZnda Šəllase at Adwa. "The top of it is of a sheet of brass which shines in the sun and looks very pretty at sunrise and sunset" (Wylde 1889: 299). Wylde's description supports the doubts raised about the "golden" roofing on Ethiopian churches, which the Arab chronicler had recorded. It is possible that sheets of brass or copper might have produced the same effect

of shimmering gold as those observed by Wylde on the roof of ʾZnda Šəllase church three centuries later. A 17th-century witness, the Jesuit, Manoel de Almeida, also refers to gold being used for the decoration of churches. In describing the splendour of the late 15th-century ruins of the church of Märtulä Maryam, he particularly admired the roses carved on the fallen stones which were so well executed that "they could not be better". He also heard that many of these roses had originally been covered over with silver and gold. He expressed doubts, however, that "there would have been many, but it is not incredible that there should have been some" (Beckingham 1954: 104).

Almeida's fellow-missionary, Barradas, writes about men wearing heavy golden chains with small crosses "having long and short arms" as adornments (Beccari 1912: 44). In 1730, according to the chronicler of Iyasu II, when the death of his father Bäkaffa was announced to the inhabitants of Gondär and his accession to the throne proclaimed, the clergy from all churches came in a procession to the funeral. All wore crowns and carried crosses and incense burners which were "made of gold" (Guidi 1954: 32). The clergy carried similar "golden" crosses in 1740 during the solemn dedication ceremony of the church, which ʾItege Məntəwwab, mother of Iyasu, had built in her residence at Q'əsq'am (Guidi 1954: 97).

All existing "golden" crosses which are regarded as extremely valuable were, in fact, exclusively made of brass or occasionally silver, which was then thinly covered in gilt. It is difficult to determine whether this was due to the fact that the donor could only afford a small quantity of gold or whether there was a technological factor, given that gold is a soft metal and requires a stronger metal as a base. In some cases, crosses which appeared to have been made of gold were, in reality, made of brass or copper. It follows that the texts from the past make no distinction between the term "golden" and "gilded".

The cross, however, which Ləbnä Dəngəl offered to Pope Clemens VII was indeed of pure gold, a fact which Alvares strongly emphasised (Alvares 1961: 418, 496).

Virtually all gilded crosses are of the Gondärene type, and are ascribed to the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the period that co-

incides with the reigns of Iyasu I, Bäkaffa, Iyasu II and the regency of Məntəwwab. Their chroniclers extensively use the term “golden” whenever they write about crosses and other church objects. It is significant that they rarely use the adjective “silver”, which corroborates the fact that only a very small number of crosses made of this material originated during that period.

Mansfield Parkyns, a British traveller who spent three years in Ethiopia during the late 1840s, was employed for a considerable time by Greek silversmiths and consequently acquired a knowledge of many of their secret procedures. As a result, his precise and highly professional information on gilding is most valuable. “The gilding,” he writes, “is usually made to assume a red colour by a simple process. This depth of colour pleases the natives, as they take it to be owing to the large quantity of gold used on it, whereas a charge of the commonest gunpowder is sufficient to red- den any quantity of the very slight gilding they receive. The poor silversmiths here are obliged to be rogues, whether they like it or not. I believe they make a tolerably good thing of their business, but it is entirely by appropriating a large portion of both gold and silver entrusted to them for work. The silver they receive is in Maria Theresa dollars: what they return is, I should think, scarcely as good as a Turkish piastre, and in fact contains scarcely one-third of silver, if so much” (Parkyns 1853: II, 15).

The Polish scholar, Zbigniew Ratyński, who made a study of Nubian crosses, developed a theory concerning the crosses depicted in paintings. Since the crosses, which kings, queens and eparchs or provincial governors are holding are painted yellow, Ratyński suggests that the actual crosses were probably made of gold. This suggestion is not necessarily contradicted by the fact that the crosses found at various archeological sites were exclusively made of bronze (Ratyński 1982: 257–258). It is an established truth that objects fashioned from precious materials are among the first to be selected by thieves and are rarely recovered.

The liturgical objects which rulers donated to churches were presumably made of brass or silver and covered with a thin layer of gilt. One of these was a cross given by Aye ʒskəndər to Märḥä Krəstos for the church at Däbrä Libanos, and the hagiographer described it as “golden” (Kur 1972: 81), meaning that the king’s

name had been engraved on it, in order to attest to the donation. This is among the earliest records of the practice to be preserved in writing. Considering that most of the known royal “signatures” are engraved on processional crosses, it may be safely assumed that the cross donated by ʒskəndər was also in this category.

The major problem with accepting the stories about golden crosses and crowns is the question of how much of this metal was available in the country. European sources during the Middle Ages included fantastical tales about the wealth of Ethiopian rulers who were reputed to have great quantities of gold and precious stones. Manoel de Almeida, a reputable witness of early 17th-century Ethiopia, repeats the often-reported statement made by Susnəyos, that none of his predecessors ever had any gold or silver treasure and, in fact, his own wealth included only about 30 kgs of gold (Beckingham 1954: 85).

Contrary to the condition of those who worked in iron or pottery, in the second decade of the 19th century Pearce wrote that “those who work in silver and gold, in brass . . . are esteemed as persons of high rank” (Pearce 1831: 286).

Among scholars who study Ethiopian crosses, there is a virtual consensus that in Ethiopia a special symbolic and spiritual meaning is assigned to each part of the cross. There are, however, two principal limitations in pursuing studies of this kind. The first relates to the sources of information. There is always a degree of uncertainty about whether the informant, usually a scholar of the Ethiopian Church, has given an explanation which has been transmitted from generation to generation and whose veracity is generally accepted or whether he has spontaneously invented it for the occasion. Traditional Church scholars are generally endowed with a rich imagination and, in turn, this may lead to flights of fancy from time to time.

The second difficulty in connection with such studies is the dichotomy between the significance accorded particular parts of the cross by foreign visitors and the interpretation of these same parts by Ethiopians. Foreigners interested in the symbolism of the cross tend to borrow explanations relating to their own country of origin. French scholar Claude Lepage wrote scornfully about Ethiopian priests as well as certain foreign amateurs who readily give their own symbolic interpretations of these details (Lepage 1975: 76). Unfortunately, however, in his writings there are no specific details referring to what these "prêtres éthiopiens" actually said.

A typical example of these difficulties is the small curved forms ornamenting the 12th- to 13th-century crosses commonly referred to as "Lalibäla" crosses. Foreign scholars provide an extensive array of possible explanations regarding the symbolism of that form. Pierre Petrides, for instance, saw "a dove symbolising the Holy Ghost", a particular characteristic of the "Lalibäla" crosses, and he also related that some monks believed these forms represented the "Ark of the Covenant" (Petrides 1969: 74). On the same subject, David Buxton wrote: "Associated with the loops or the cross or both, we find distinctive curved and pointed projections which appear to be greatly stylised heads of doves: if so, they could be intended to symbolise the Holy Spirit . . ." (Buxton 1970:

174). Jean Doresse, a French scholar who is also a Coptologist, believes he has clarified the puzzle by stating that the so-called wings were, in fact, "the stylised outlines of dolphins or fish, a motif frequently ornamenting Coptic representations of the cross" (Doresse 1971: 560–561). The Copts borrowed the motif from Greco-Roman iconography and used it extensively in their art. In a Christian context, the dolphin is associated with the cross and symbolises salvation from sin.

In northern Ethiopia, a particularly clear design of a fish or dolphin is found in the stucco decorating the west wall at the entrance to the vestibule of the rock-hewn church *Abrəha Aşbəha* in Wuqro Region, Təgray (fig. 25). The bas-reliefs suggest that the dolphin motif and its religious symbolism were known to Ethiopians relatively early in the Christian era. This also seems to explain the name, *Däbrä Asa*, or Monastery of the Fish, given to the monastery situated close to Abiy Addi, Tämben, which is believed to have been founded by *Abba Yoḥanni* in the 14th century. Another example of the same motif is found in a processional cross of the so-called "Lalibäla" type. The cross is ornamented with what appears to be the figures of stylised dolphins or fish (fig. 26). The resident monks were unable to answer the author's questions about the origin of the name, but asserted that it was miraculously brought from "outside". As usual, there is a grain of truth in these legendary stories: the symbols in the cross have probably been borrowed from the art of the Copts and reflect their love of representing aquatic life as well as animals in their carving, paintings and textiles.

In his descriptions of hand crosses, Buxton writes that "sometimes little birds adorn the margins of the cross, possibly as symbols of the Holy Spirit. They could have been suggested by the birds which are often scattered round the ornamental frames of canon-tables in early Abyssinian Gospels" (Buxton 1970: 172). The bird design, however, in early Ethiopian Gospels was borrowed from the ornamentation in Armenian Gospels and the connection, if any, with the Holy Spirit would be an interpretation based on imported models. Buxton also writes that the rectangular base at the lower end of the stem is thought to represent the *tabot*, or altar stone in churches (Buxton 1970: 169).

For Petrides, on the other hand, the curved flaring arms of Gondär-type crosses are "the stylised form of the Horn of the Lamb of God (Jesus Christ)" (Petrides 1969: 74), which corresponds to the name *qärnä bäg'ä* given to that cross by Ethiopians. He further declares that in early 19th-century crosses, "the multiple intercrossed and interlaced lines going in all directions with apparently no end are thus symbolic of eternity and infinity – the Eternity of Divine Rule and the Infinity of the Creation" (Petrides 1969: 76).

Murad Kamil, a Coptic ecclesiastic, who spent several years in Ethiopia as a teacher in the Orthodox College in the 1950s, developed an interest in collecting crosses and enquired about the significance of their particular features. "Squares and circles," he asserts, "symbolise the four directions of earth and the rule of the Cross and Christ, according to the Revelation 7, 1". The form of the so-called Jerusalem cross means the spreading of Christianity; the Greek cross signifies the "infinite which leads to eternity". Dome-shaped circles and cavities symbolise the five wounds of Christ (Kamil 1975: 73).

The imaginative explanations of American scholar Csilla Fabo Perczel in her article entitled "Ethiopian Crosses: Christianised Symbols of a Pagan Cosmology" offer a new source for inquiry. Referring to the lower arms of processional crosses she writes: "Quite often there appear stylised leaves or birds engraved or attached to these 'branches' and frequently the lower arms ending in biomorphic shapes resemble a pair of snakes or birds in heraldic arrangement, turning either away from or towards the dominant solar motif . . . The processional crosses were not intended to represent the natural form of any tree; they do, however, present the concept of the trunk (shaft), the branches (lower arms) and the crown of a tree (cross), implying the Tree of Life, accompanied by birds and snakes, perhaps signifying the heavens and the earth, or the sun and water. These life-sustaining elements were worshipped by the ancient Near Eastern cultures . . . Ethiopian customs, apparently controlled by such pre-Christian principles, have been preserved to this day" (Perczel 1980: 436–437). Perczel does not seem to make a clear distinction between the Christian tradition and the ancestral animist Oromo customs, both of which

co-existed historically. Further study, made with attention to precision, of the possible influence of one tradition over another could certainly be seminal. Perczel appears, however, to reduce all her conclusions on the subject of the symbolic meaning of crosses to the symbols of life and fertility, a position which she shares with many American Africanists. In her second article, Perczel relates the forms of the cross to the Ethiopian liturgy. Perczel was probably attending the service as an interested observer, yet we find the account of the use of crosses rather vague and of the use of the lyre rather dubious (Perczel 1983: 19–28).

In the same vein, in 1990, Dorothea Hecht, Brigitta Benzing and Girma Kidane (Gərma Kidanä) published a selective catalogue of hand crosses in the collection of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies Museum in Addis Abäba. Following an introduction, they present a “Symbolic Chain of the Ethiopian Handcross”, ascribing names to all its parts. The nomenclature is partly drawn from general concepts such as “benediction”, “spiritual wisdom [sic]”, “sacrifice” or “death”; while other names refer to Ethiopian concepts such as “Adam’s tomb” (Hecht 1990: 17). Regrettably, like a number of other scholars, they do not indicate the sources from which the “Symbolic Chain” proposition was derived. Although it is possible that some explanations were suggested by traditional Church scholars, it appears that on their own initiative, they subsequently arranged these to form catch-words or phrases. It is unfortunate that, once published, this “Symbolic Chain of the Ethiopian Handcross” acquired an unwarranted degree of credibility in the realm of serious research.

In his article on Ethiopian crosses, a young Ethiopian scholar, Bantalem Tadesse, designates them as “Orthodox” – a term that is not generally accepted. On the one hand he questions certain information gleaned from foreign scholars, however at the same time, he draws upon the results of their research (Bantalem 2003: 371, 373–387).

The essential weakness of most of the above explanations is that they were written from the standpoint of the foreigner interested in Ethiopian crosses. What is required is, in fact, the opposite, namely an in-depth analysis from the indigenous standpoint – an examination of how the individuals who produced these cross-

es considered the form of the cross which they had wrought with their own hands. It would also be enlightening to explore local opinions given by those who wore or carried these crosses. In effect, what further knowledge can be acquired directly from Ethiopian sources about the symbolic meaning of the various parts of the cross?

The major source available – *Šar‘atä betä krästiyan* or the Rules or Customs of the Church – was first published and translated by Marcel Griaule in 1932. Half a century later, another French scholar, Roger Schneider, published a complementary article to that of Griaule. There are two categories within the texts entitled Rules. The first category, written in Gə‘əz, gives commentaries and prescriptions concerning the Church and religious ceremonies.

The texts of the second category, written in Amharic and only infrequently in Gə‘əz, include the symbolic meanings given to the various parts of the church building and its compound as well as to some accessory objects to the service (Schneider 1988: 96). Often written on pieces of paper as marginal notes on teaching the rules, these leave room for a variety of interpretations. They are generally known and followed by the learned people of the Church. As *Raq-mäsära* Kaša from Dima Giyorgis, who was one of Griaule’s informants, put it: “Anything has a symbol; as it is said, words by symbols, hymns by melody” (Griaule 1932: 35).

Curiously, there is virtually no information contained in the Rules about the symbolic quality of the various parts of crosses, while in contrast the information relating to the symbolism associated with the component parts of incense burners is quite detailed. Also, the text extensively describes the symbolic meaning of the materials from which crosses are made. The relevant passages, however, are only found in two versions of the Rules out of the five published by Griaule. One is on fol. 2r-2v in the 17th-century manuscript, but fols. 139–142 were added at a later date (collection d’Abbadie 13 found in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris) (Griaule 1932: 11) and the second on fol. 53v-54r in Ms. 10 is in the Marcel Cohen collection (Griaule 1932: 19).

Schneider published the text of the Rules found in Ms. d’Abbadie 26, which is attributed to the 18th century (designated as A),

with the variants found in two other texts, one presently kept at the National Library in Addis Abäba (designated B) and the second is the 19th-century Ms. d'Abbadie 247 at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris (designated C).

All these texts illustrate the basic uniformity of the symbolic traditions about crosses and generally give the impression that either the compilers of the Rules had little to record or they failed to consider the subject sufficiently important to put it into writing. Nevertheless in text A fol. 80v, there is a symbolic interpretation relating to the cross which is found at the top of every Orthodox church in Ethiopia. It reads: "The top is the unity of the Trinity, the cross which is above means or is the Divinity (an interpretation which is closer to the original text). This is because the Lord is above all; there is nothing above Him, neither sky (in B – the Earth – has been added), house or clothing (in B omitted) nor dwelling. He Himself is the house and its cover" (Schneider 1988: 77). In texts B fol. 17r and C fol. 40r, the same is stated more simply: "The top is the union of the Trinity; and the cross above it is the Divinity" (Schneider 1988: 88). In C fol. 17r, it is additionally explained that the "cross represents the one on which He was crucified" (Schneider 1988: 85).

A characteristic feature of such roof-top crosses, usually made of iron, is the ostrich eggs attached to their two arms and the apex of the stem as well as the additional four bars radiating in between. In the Church Rules, these seven eggs are interpreted as "the reminder of the [past] sins" (Schneider 1988: 85). The idea is further developed in Ms. 13 d'Abbadie coll. which states that the seven eggs symbolise all the sins which the faithful have committed but failed to confess to the priest. On the day of the Last Judgement, these oval-shaped and shining eggs will appear and declare "Here we are" (Griaule 1932: 7–8). Furthermore, according to German scholar Ernst Hammerschmidt, the Ethiopian Church theology, like Physiologus, interprets these eggs as a symbolic deterrent to the faithful to keep their souls from any harm just as the ostrich jealously watches over its eggs (Hammerschmidt 1977: 128). Physiologus, however, describes the ostrich as an animal which does not deposit her eggs in the ground until the star called Vergilia rises. When this happens – usually in the month of June –

the female ostrich digs a hole in the ground, deposits her eggs, and covers them with sand. Once having departed from that place she immediately forgets it and does not return to her eggs. The hot sand incubates the chicks. The moral of this story is that it is more fitting for humans . . . to forget earthly things and pursue heavenly things and "raise the eyes of our hearts" (Curley 1979: 57–58).

Ethiopians share the custom of displaying ostrich eggs with the Copts in Egypt. In their ancient churches, hollow ostrich eggs are suspended on chains between the lamps before the *haikal* or sanctuary screen (Cramer 1959: 22; Burmester 1967: 28). In a 9th–10th-century liturgical handbook of the Coptic Church, the explanation is given about the use of lamps and the display of ostrich eggs in churches. Ostrich eggs are displayed because of the entirely different manner from that of all other birds of brooding and hatching eggs. The male and female both sit together on the pile of eggs and from this position they watch steadily over the eggs for the required time. If the gaze of one bird should waver or falter from even one egg, that egg will be spoiled and will not hatch. The people of the church take these eggs and hang them between the lamps not as a decoration, but as a symbol: a spoiled egg, not embraced by its parent's gaze, is a warning to whomsoever prays that his prayer will be spoiled just as the ostrich egg if his mind wanders from the words of prayer. Thus the ostrich eggs are hung in the church to encourage concentration in prayer (Assfalg 1955: 96–97).

Furthermore, the fascination with ostrich eggs in Africa is an ancient phenomenon. The Punic tombs at Carthage were ornamented with them as well the tombs along the caravan routes of the Sahara Desert. Ostrich eggs were found similarly used 1,800 years before Christ in Abydos of Pharaonic Egypt. Although there is no definite proof that the custom of ornamenting crosses was known in Ethiopia before the 17th century, the Coptic influence, if any, could have found a receptive environment.

Returning briefly to the rules of the Ethiopian Church, they also offer the symbolic interpretation of various materials from which crosses are made. A full explanation about the use of wood is given in Ms. C fol. 16: "If one asks 'why is the cross made of wood' [the answer is] before Jerusalem was built, there was [a tree] cut from Paradise. When people tried to use it as a pole or

extension of an enclosure it did not work. They made Christ carry it and crucified Him over the head of Adam. When His blood flowed over [it], this was a sacrifice for the [redemption] of Adam" (Schneider 1988: 82). "In this way the Cross was made" (Griaule 1932: 12). In the Marcel Cohen Ms. 10 fol. 52v, it is simply stated that the wood of the cross was seven cubits long (Griaule 1932: 19).

The origin of the Ethiopian explanations is the legend of the Holy Cross circulating the Near East and Western Europe which refers to the twig from the Tree of Life or – in Jewish tradition – the Tree of Wisdom in Paradise brought by Seth to his father. The twig was planted at the Patriarch's grave and grew into a big tree. According to another version, King Solomon tried to use it for the building of the Temple, but somehow the wood was either too long or too short (Quinn 1962: 89–100).

The Cross which was set "over the head of Adam" is an expression of an old belief that the wooden Crucifixion beam was placed on Calvary where Adam was buried so that the Saviour's blood would fall on Adam's head and his sins would be washed away (Quinn 1962: 100). The visual expression of this in Ethiopian paintings of the Crucifixion is the skull of Adam usually depicted at the bottom of the Cross and it is abundantly streaked with the blood of Christ (Chojnacki 2000: 30).

Turning to the metals selected for the production of crosses, a question arises with regard to the use of copper. The answer given in d'Abbadie 247 fol. 16 is "because the Son's [Christ's] blood touched it" (Schneider 1988: 82) as well as in Ms. d'Abbadie 13 fol. 142r (Griaule 1932: 11). Both explanations clearly refer to the reddish colour of the metal used extensively by Ethiopian craftsmen for making crosses.

The silver crosses are interpreted in Abb. 247 fol. 16r as the thirty pieces of silver for which Judas "sold our God" (Schneider 1988: 82) and similar answers are cited in Ms. d'Abbadie 13 and Cohen 10 (Griaule 1932: 11, 19).

The explanation of the golden cross found in Abb. 247 fol. 16r states that: "it is not because it is beautiful; once upon a time, three Magi offered Him gold for His royal dignity, frankincense for His priesthood and myrrh for His death. To the one who car-

ried gold, He appeared as a man thirty years old, to the one who carried incense He appeared as a child, and to the one who carried the myrrh He appeared as an old man" (Schneider 1988: 82).

The question "Why is iron used to make crosses?" is answered succinctly in the Ms. Eth. 581 fol. 20v (Griaule 1932: 273) at the Bibliothèque Nationale. "This is because of the nails" (Schneider 1988: 92), while in Ms. d'Abbadie 13 fol. 142r the explanation is more elaborate. It states: "This is for the blows of fists which Christ received, for being bound, for being pierced with nails, for receiving slaps in the face" (Griaule 1932: 11). Finally, the theme is extensively explained in Ms. Marcel Cohen 10 fol. 52v: "The iron is the image of the crown of thorns with three-hundred sharp points which was put upon His head and which pierced [Him] as with nails" (Griaule 1932: 19). The imaginative local scholars were clearly inspired by the visual representation of the sufferings of Christ as they are depicted in the *kur'atā rā 'asu* or "Striking of His head", a painting which was widely known and copied by Ethiopian painters from the 17th century onwards (Chojnacki 1985: 12–54).

The text in the same Ms. Cohen 10 also refers to the legend of the Tree of Paradise from which eventually the Calvary Cross was made and the theme is further elaborated. "When the trunk fell in front of the gate of Solomon's temple, it restored sight to the blind, straightened the lame, healed the people possessed by the demon and cleansed the leprous. In recompense, rich and poor people alike adorned the trunk with gold, silver, bronze [brass], and copper. It is for this reason," the text concludes, "that the cross is made of these materials" (Griaule 1932: 19).

The above explanation is derived from another version of the legend of the Holy Cross. Solomon placed the sacred beam in the Temple. When the Queen of Sheba saw it she prophesied that one would die on it who would destroy the kingdom of Israel. The wood was then thrown into the Pool of Probation where it effected cures (Quinn 1962: 89, 100). The miraculous healing quality of the Cross thus appears as one of the significant reasons for its widespread production and use in Ethiopia. In fact, the sicknesses enumerated in the Ms. Cohen 10 correspond to the most common maladies in the country.

It follows from this detailed description that the official teaching on Cross symbolism by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is solidly based on Christological and Old Testament foundations. Furthermore, the foreign scholars who attempted to describe its symbolism failed to consider two important points, the first being that, in fact, there is no official teaching within the Church about the symbolic meaning of the forms of crosses and their various parts. The only exception is the cross at the top of churches, although, paradoxically, foreign scholars completely failed to take an interest in this or they based their conclusions on isolated local traditions.

Given the fact that the Church itself, as well as its scholars and the faithful, had always been deeply concerned with the materials from which crosses were made and which were, in fact, the major criteria for their identification, foreign scholars focused their attention on their symbolic meaning. A continuing study of the subject may reveal the origin of some previously unknown aspects of Ethiopian spirituality.

In general, Ethiopians of the Orthodox faith are not especially concerned with the symbolic meaning given to particular parts of crosses. When asked about symbolism, priests very often are hesitant to respond and the meaning of the three main parts of the cross may vary according to regional beliefs. As explained by the scholarly *Abba* Gäbrä Mika'el of Däbrä Šärabi, in the case of hand crosses, basically the cross at the top signifies the Crucifixion, the handle, *qäranyo* or Golgotha, the place on which Jesus was crucified, and the square base at the bottom of the handle represents the *šallat* or *tabot* or Ark of the Covenant. The *šallat* is a slab of wood or stone on which is engraved a religious quotation and a symbol or picture of a holy person or a scene related to the life of the individual to whom the *šallat* is dedicated. The *šallat* is kept within a container known as the *tabot* (Kane 1990: II, 2250; Getatchew Haile 2001: 34). The *tabot* (with the *šallat* in it) is the Ethiopian equivalent of the Ark of the Covenant (Getatchew Haile 2001: 38).

In some places, such as the Qoqolo Yoḥannēs church in 3ndārta, according to the priests' version, the cross at the top may have the meaning of *qäranyo* (Golgotha) and the base at the bottom of the holder, especially of an open form (Moore 1973: 80),

has the meaning of *mānbärä tabot*, a chest in which the *šallat* and *tabot* are kept. As to the handle, priests occasionally assert that it has no special symbolic meaning at all. In rare instances, confusion occurs when the palindrome for the names of the five nails of the Cross of Golgotha or wounds of Christ, *sador* or *sator*, *alador* or *arädor*, *tenet* or *dänat*, *otera* or *adera* and *rodas* (Staude 1971: 5–6; Basset 1895: 16; Chojnacki 2000: 476) are given as the symbolic meaning of the particular parts of any hand cross.

After due consideration, the author had concluded that a new approach to the evolution of Ethiopian crosses would be appropriate. The information obtained from the written records have been integrated into an examination of the depictions of various types of crosses in paintings and other forms. The basic premise of this type of investigation is the assumption that the depictions of crosses in miniatures, icons, mural paintings and any other representations were almost exclusively based on the artists' own observations of life around them, and as a result would offer a visual record of the form as well as the use of crosses at a particular time. Given that these painted representations are either accurately dated or ascribed with some certainty to definite periods, an attempt will be made to link the crosses to these periods and group them together.

In addition, the selected depictions will be compared to existing crosses which are either clearly dated or whose date of origin can be reasonably assumed to be accurate. All the relevant material has been chronologically classified into specific periods and then into sub-sections according to the types of crosses involved. Because of their importance for use in the liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, processional and large hand crosses were donated to churches and monasteries by various Ethiopian rulers and people of importance and this is verified by the inscriptions incised on them indicating by whom and to what church the cross was given.

The earliest record of the practice of "signing" crosses is described in the story of Däbrä Halle Luya. Dawit II sent his own golden cross to this monastery and ordered a lengthy dedication (Getatchew Haile 1980: 170–171). 3skändər later gave Märhä Krəstos, the Abbot of Däbrä Libanos, a cross which was part of a generous donation of church paraphernalia the ruler made to that monastery. The hagiographer recorded that the sovereign "signed the cross" (Kur 1972: 81). Considering that all known royal "signatures" are found engraved on processional crosses, it may be

safely assumed that the cross donated by ʒskəndər was also in this category.

Another of the earliest crosses in existence, and one which is also distinguished by a royal inscription, is the silver cross of ʒär'a Ya'əqob kept in the treasury of the Ta'aminä Maryam monastery in Tämben. The silver processional cross which Yoḥannəs I, 1667–1682, and his wife Säblä Wängel donated to Wifat Šəllase church in Bägemdər presently is in the collection of the IES (Moore 1971: 49–50, fig. 50). A gilt diamond-shaped brass processional cross at the IES Museum (Moore 1971: 60–63, fig. 47) is one of many donations to churches and monasteries made by Iyasu II and his mother Məntəwwab. Provincial rulers also followed suit. Around 1782, *Mär'ad azmač* Asfa Wäsän, 1775–1808, ruler of Šäwa, also sent crosses as gifts to Däbrä Məṭmaq church situated in Amhara province (Blundell 1922: 228). Information on crosses in royal chronicles is virtually non-existent, although one would hardly expect the Ethiopians to describe in detail an object used so extensively in everyday life. More material on crosses is available, however, in hagiographic and other religious texts. These offer important information on the use of crosses and the beliefs relating to them.

Among the various travellers from abroad who recorded their impressions of Ethiopia, the richest source of information relating to crosses is the narrative of Father Francisco Alvares. During the six years of his sojourn in the country, Alvares became genuinely interested in the organization and liturgy of the Ethiopian Church as well as the religious practices of the people. He also developed friendly relations with the clergy and monks. Alvares was a keen and conscientious observer and, on the whole, his information is reliable because he simply recorded what he actually saw and experienced. At times, however, he may have accorded too high a degree of credibility to the stories which various Ethiopians attempted to impress upon him.

Alvares had the unique opportunity of observing Ethiopia before both the Adal invasion in the 1530s and the subsequent fateful Oromo encroachments. He was also fortunate enough to see and admire many of the cultural treasures that had been accumulated during three centuries of relative stability and expansion.

Travellers from the 17th century onwards experienced an Ethiopia which was both impoverished and greatly diminished in size. As well, it bore the memory of burned and looted churches, which had left much of the country's cultural heritage destroyed – an ancient heritage which had its beginnings in the city of Aksum.

Part I: Crosses of the Aksumite Period

This period, from the 4th to the 7th century A.D., is a culmination of developments in the remote past related to the Sabeization of northern Ethiopia and coincides with the foundation of the Ethiopian state which was involved in political developments along the eastern and western coast of the Red Sea and in its important trade route from the Asian continent to the Mediterranean. The centre of the state was in the area populated by Təgreñña-speaking people with the hub of the new state being Aksum and the surrounding area.

The Aksumite period also witnessed cross-cultural and religious interaction with the Near East as well as the acceptance of Christianity in about 340 A.D., which played a decisive role in the political and cultural destiny of the Ethiopian people for the following two millennia.

Early in the 20th century, the 1906 Deutsche Aksum-Expedition undertook extensive archaeological research principally in Aksum and its environs although their investigations also involved visits to Asmära, Däbrä Damo and some areas of Eritrea. Four volumes chronicling the results of this extensive expedition were published in 1913 and include several drawings of crosses as well as ornamental patterns in the form of a cross.

One drawing shows a low-relief cross at the top of the pillar forming part of a wall in Šəyon Maryam church. This is a cross within a circle of the (Ia) type (DAE 1913: II, 65, fig. 144). The form is similar to the crosses on the reverse of the Anonymous coins category (Munro-Hay 1995: type 52, JJ14 364) and is generally common in Aksumite coinage. A second cross was also cut in low-relief at the top of another such pillar in the same church. The cross is shown on top of a palmette pattern and is of the patée type with its three finials noticeably indented (DAE 1913: II, 106, fig. 240). This particular form does not, however, appear to have

been used in the coinage of the Aksumite era. A third cross, also cut in low-relief on the head of a free-standing pillar is of the patée type with distinctly narrowing extremities which are virtually touching each other, resulting in a cross which forms a square (DAE 1913: II, 65, fig. 142). Although not found in Aksumite coinage, this particular form became characteristic of Ethiopian crosses during the second millennium A.D.

The same form was also known to Christian Nubians. An existing example is a wooden cross found in a bishop's grave at Faras Cathedral and is broadly ascribed to the 13th–15th century (Ratyński 1982: 251–256). During the lengthy period of archaeological excavations and research from 1954 to 1972 in Aksum and various other parts of Təgray conducted by French scholars on behalf of the Imperial Archaeological Institute, surprisingly few crosses were unearthed. In 1957, Henri de Contenson found one small cross made of greenish soft stone (J.E. 612) on the level of red pottery (Contenson 1959: III, 32). During the 1958 excavation of the ruins of an old church at 3nda Čärqos in Mälašo, he found two small bronze crosses (J.E. 1382) which he considered as artifacts that “certainly post-date the Aksumite civilisation and they do not seem to have originated prior to the 10th century” (Contenson 1961: IV, 41), but unfortunately he has provided no reproductions of any of these items.

In turn, Francis Anfray in 1960 excavated about twenty tombs at Yəḥa. In tomb no. 13, 3 metres down he came upon a bronze cross measuring 5.7 to 4.6 cm (J.E. 3282, a–c). Anfray ascribes the tomb's date of origin to the pre-Christian era, but assumes that it was opened and reused during the Christian era (Anfray 1963: V, 188, pl. CLII, b). The cross is so heavily oxidised that a definitive designation of type is not possible, but it broadly relates to a pectoral cross found in Faras, Christian Nubia, which is currently in the collection of the Warsaw National Museum (no. 234634) and to a similar cross probably originating from Egypt and ascribed to the 7th century (Ratyński 1982: 241–247).

In tomb no. 17, which is 2 metres deep, two bronze crosses in addition to one alabaster cross were found along with some human bones (J.E. 2396). The measurements of the crosses are unfortunately not given (Anfray 1963: V, 188, pl. CLII, a, c, d). Since

this is the only recorded incidence of crosses having been found in the same place as human bones, it strongly suggests that the deceased were buried together with the above crosses as well as the earliest examples of Ethiopian neck crosses.

During the same excavations, Anfray also came upon other tombs which were of an entirely different type. They were relatively shallow (30–40 cm) and covered with roughly worked stones. In tomb no. 16 among the bones which had turned to dust, Anfray mentions having collected a few bronze crosses. He published reproductions of two of them (J.E. 9389, 189–190, pl. CII, e and I.E. 2390, 189–190, pl. CII, f, “tombeau f”). Anfray gives no indication of their age except for the general observation that “they are not recent” (Anfray 1963: 189–190). The fact that Anfray made no attempt to date these tombs does not lessen the importance of this discovery. The form of the crosses found in this tomb bears a striking similarity to the form generally used in Aksumite coinage throughout the whole Christian period and especially with the crosses found at the top of hand crosses and staffs, while the cross numbered by Anfray (2396f) is of the first type, fifth form in the typology of Aksumite crosses.

The 1962 and 1963 excavations at Mätära, or present-day Sänafe, brought the discovery of two gold crosses as well as a hoard of Roman coins dating to the 2nd and 3rd century, which had obviously been worn for ornamentation. The larger of the two crosses (J.E. 2909), ascribed to the 6th century, is clearly of the Byzantine type (Bank 1977: fig. 104) and belonged either to a lay or ecclesiastic dignitary. This was worn on a chain which was also found at the site. The second cross is more elaborate and it is likely that it was originally studded with five precious stones. The large and intricate pendant attached to it indicates that the cross was used for formal display (Anfray 1965: VI, 68–70, pl. LXIX).

The 1972–1974 excavations at Aksum carried out by the British Institute in Eastern Africa failed to unearth any metal crosses. Instead, in a few sites, small pottery crosses were found which are pierced and were presumably intended to be worn as pendants. They vary in size, and their function is not known (Munro-Hay 1989: 313). On the other hand, the cross as a symbol of Christianity was extensively used on Aksumite pottery. It is ei-

ther painted or engraved or formed in low-relief on various types of earthenware.

During the 1962 and 1963 excavations at Mātāra, Anfray recorded many examples of bas-relief crosses similar to those found on the bottom of the red pottery vases J.E. 2840 and J.E. 3013 (1965: VI, 78, pl. LIV, figs. 2–3), including three patée crosses on the black pottery J.E. 2805 (1965: 79, pl. VI, fig. 6), crosses incised on the outer ring of the red pottery vases J.E. 2731 and 2807 (1965: VI, 80, pl. LVIII, figs. 7–8) as well as low-relief crosses on the seal in red pottery J.E. 2860 (1965: 83, pl. LXVI, figs. 6–7).

The late Stuart Munro-Hay, a member of the British Institute in Eastern Africa's research group in Aksum, recorded that the crosses on the ware were painted red, while at the end of the Red Pottery period a characteristic decoration is the incised crosses found on the shoulders of pots and set below the rim, dating to the 5th century or perhaps a little earlier (Munro-Hay 1989: 239). He gives a few examples such as figs. 97, 237. Writing about Brown Aksumite ware, Munro-Hay noted that crosses and related motifs in a wide interpretative range are incised, or more commonly, crudely gouged on the shoulders or lower rims and on the ledges of ledge-rim bowls (Munro-Hay 1989: 290). He also gives a comprehensive set of cross designs (1989: 297, fig. 16.349).

The British Institute continued to dig and conduct research in Aksum and published a detailed report of the 1993 to 1997 results (Phillipson 2000). However, no discovery of metal crosses was recorded. This can most probably be explained by the fact that the metal objects at many sites had already been pillaged, while, over the course of many centuries, the wooden crosses which might have been used extensively had disintegrated. There remains, however, the unresolved question of how widely the custom of burying the faithful with their crosses was actually practised. Given the limited number of crosses found in the excavations in Ethiopia, it is the coinage and pottery ornamentation of the Aksumite era that must be considered for further study. Carvings in wood ornamenting various churches also reveal the prevailing forms of crosses in use at the time.

In Aksumite coins of the Christian era, the sign of the cross

is shown on all issues except the last when the cross is represented as a physical object, such as a hand cross (*fig. 27*). In the evolution of Aksumite coinage, the cross thus developed into a central motif of the Christian faith. While on the obverse side of the coin, above the ruler's head there is a small sign of the cross; on the reverse, there is a large one accompanied by a religious inscription (Hahn 1999: 448).

The earliest sign of the cross is to be found on the gold coins minted during the reign of King Ezana dated to 330–360 (Munro-Hay 1995: types 41, 44–47, types 47–49; Hahn 1999: 42–48). It is an equal-armed cross with flared finials, a variant of the patée cross. Throughout the following four centuries, this clear evidence of the Christian identity of the rulers and their kingdom continued to be seen either on the obverse or reverse of the coins, and the Italian scholar Arturo Anzani produced a table of sixteen varieties of them (Anzani 1926: 23).

The Aksumite cross, however, evolved from three basic types. The first type is the Paw-cross, or *croix patée*, which is most common and also reputed to be of Syro-Palestinian origin (Buxton 1972: 164–166). The second type is an equal-armed and parallel-sided Greek cross and the third type is the Latin cross. There are several intermediary forms related to the method of striking or overstriking and use of varied dies, but on the whole they belong to the generally established typology of crosses.

The crosses shown as a reverse motif on silver and copper coins are either set within a smooth-edged or rope-edged circle. Some of them are framed in an architectural setting which consists of two similar columns supporting an arch. In the 7th-century King Armaḥ or Arməḥa issue, such crosses are framed by two wheat-stalks. The patée cross, designated with the Latin number "I" appears to have evolved into four forms based on specific details.

In the first form (Ia), the arms are of equal length and flared and their finials are distinctly flat, but pointed on both horizontal tips (*fig. 166*) (Anzani 1928: 3–4; Juel-Jensen 1990: 4; Munro-Hay 1995: Ouazebas 57i, JJ314). Some crosses are shown on the reverse that are set within a circle (Munro-Hay 1995: Anonymous 52, JJ14, 345.364) or an octagon (Munro-Hay 1995: Hataz 140, JJ84). The form is also found in Coptic crosses (Cramer 1959: figs.

25, 55) as well as in Christian Nubia (Dinkler 1970: figs. 75, 103, 130). A cross in low-relief incised on a 6th-century stone lintel in Faras Cathedral is now part of the collection of the Warsaw Muzeum Narodowe (Inv. no. 234699) and this form also occurs in Byzantine crosses. An example is the cross appearing in the 6th-century diptych, no. 1123, in the Moscow Historical Museum (Bank 1977: fig. 50).

In the second form (Ib), the arms are also of equal length and flared but their finials are slightly curved instead of being flat (*fig. 167*). There is a significant graduation in the flaring of the cross-arms from slender (Munro-Hay 1995: Anonymous 52, JJ345) to broad (Munro-Hay 1995: Anonymous 52, JJ346; Joel 131, JJ57; Juel-Jensen 1990: fig. 14). The cross may, at times, be indented in the middle (Juel-Jensen 1990: fig. 12; Munro-Hay 1995: Anonymous 76, JJ281) and variously set within a ring (Munro-Hay 1995: Anonymous JJ14; Juel-Jensen 1990: fig. 6) or rope-type circle (Munro-Hay 1995: Anonymous 50, JJ33) or even a hexagon (Juel-Jensen 1990: fig. 20). This form is also typical of Coptic crosses (Les Cahiers Coptes 1953: 44; 1954: 16, 32; Cramer 1959: 42) as well as Nubian crosses (Dinkler 1970: figs. 36, 115, 119, 139).

The third form (Ic) shows the cross-arms only slightly flaring and characteristically they are wide (*fig. 168*). This form is found in many issues dating to the reign of King Joel (Munro-Hay 1995: 131, JJ41, 57–58, 140, 159) and occasionally this category of cross has a button-like shape in the middle (Munro-Hay 1995: Joel JJ260, 332).

In the fourth form (Id), the arms of the crosses taper in a straight line to the centre, their finials are flat and the horizontal arms are usually slightly shorter than the vertical, but in this respect the form shows great variation (*fig. 171*). The lower arm is, at times, distinctly elongated. All arms appear to have slightly protruding frames and there are triangular depressions within each arm while in the middle of the cross the central depression is filled with a gold inlay. Furthermore all crosses are surrounded by an ear of wheat and they arise on the stalk from the base. This particular form is mainly found in Armaḥ coinage (Munro-Hay 1995: 153, JJ47, 106, 181, 225, 297). Its basic form without the inlay and surrounding ornamentation was apparently deeply rooted within the

country and was reproduced throughout the following centuries.

The form bears some similarity to either 10th–11th-century Byzantine enkolpions or 11th-century reliquary crosses (Carr 1977: figs. 120, 123–124; Bank 1977: figs. 25, 211). The form is also characteristic of Nubian crosses (Dinkler 1970: fig. 274). A striking example is the motif of birds with crosses over their heads carved on the early 7th-century frieze in the Faras Cathedral (Godlewski 1992: figs. 1–3, 5, 20). In turn, the second type (II) of the equal-armed and parallel-sided Greek cross is not common in Aksumite coinage (*fig. 170*). The tips of their finials are either pointed (IIa) (Juel-Jensen 1990: fig. 12) or (IIb) bent outwards as in the Moline cross type (Munro-Hay 1995: Anonymous 52, JJ81).

In the 6th-century coinage of King Wazen or Ella Gabaz, ca. 614–630, a similar cross has very slender arms, the finials of which are in the form of small crosses (Munro-Hay 1995: 120i, JJ179).

The third type (III) includes several variant forms of the Latin cross which specifically appear on the reverse of Joel coinage (ca. 550, *fig. 169*). The finials of the three upper arms of the cross are slightly flared as well as concave, while the lower arm is always distinctly elongated and rests on the lower rim of the coin (Munro-Hay 1995: 134, JJ108, 187, 200, 336).

Among the later issues of the coinage of Aksum, there is a particular type (IV) which has its own unique characteristics. It is a combination of two elongated rectangles, in which the longer rectangle stands for the vertical arm of the cross and the shorter rectangle for its horizontal arm, while at the point of intersection both form a square filled with gold inlay. The cross itself is either set under a “Brick Arch” supported by two columns which is so designated because it gives the impression of being constructed of bricks (*fig. 172*) (Munro-Hay 1995: 126, JJ176, 240, 257) or within an ear of wheat in the coinage of King Armaḥ. In this case, the cross rises on a stalk from the base (Munro-Hay 1995: 153, JJ102, 261).

Representations of crosses as a physical object in Aksumite coinage are limited to either a hand cross – usually with elongated lower arm (*fig. 27*) or a long staff topped with a cross (*figs. 28–29*). At times it is difficult to distinguish between the two. In both in-

stances, the cross is of the patée type. The obverse side of the copper ca. 450 Anonymous series shows the king holding a hand cross and this is possibly the first instance in which the cross was clearly shown as a physical object. The cross itself is of the first type and first form while the length of the stem varies. The arm of the cross rests on the lower edge of the coin and the king's hand is occasionally shown holding it (Munro-Hay 1995: 276, Anonymous 76, JJ35, 131, 321, 323).

On the obverse of the copper series, King Gersem ca. 600 is shown frontally and holds a hand cross in his right hand. In certain issues, the king's right forearm is positioned across the chest and the cross is in evidence on the king's left. In order to effect a balance, another cross appears behind the right shoulder of the king (*fig. 30*) (Munro-Hay 1995: 260, type 148, JJ3, 49 and type 149 BIEA, 73/311; Juel-Jensen 1990: 8–9, *figs. 52, JJ49*).

Finally, in the silver coinage issued by Armaḥ, the *nəguś* is shown on the obverse in a half-length bust turned to the right and appears to be holding a hand cross in his right hand in front of his face (*fig. 31a*), though Munro-Hay designates the object as “sceptre-cruciger” (Munro-Hay 1995: 151, JJ75, 180, 264). In a series of copper gilt coinage, the king is shown seated on a throne with a high back and holding a staff of variable length (*fig. 32*), but which usually extends to the lower ring. At times the king grasps the staff at the mid-point (Munro-Hay 1995: 153, JJ47, 83, 136, 181) or the place where a cross is set on the staff (Munro-Hay 1995: 153, JJ102, 137, 225). All crosses surmounting staffs are equal-armed and with distinctly flared arms.

In most pre-Christian issues of Aksumite coinage from the 3rd to the early 4th century (Munro-Hay 1995: types 5, 15, 21–23, 36–37), the kings are shown holding an elongated object, which Munro-Hay believes to be a long spear (Munro-Hay 1995: 119), but it might also be a sceptre (*fig. 33*). Sceptres were also in use in the court of Nubian kings (Vantini 1970: 42–43). In later “Christianised” issues, the staffs had crosses at the top and they acquired additional spiritual significance, therefore Munro-Hay specifically designated them as “sceptre-cruciger” or stick/sceptres. Over the ensuing centuries, such staffs were carried by members of the clergy. In carvings at the Golgotha Church in Lalibäla, the saints are

represented carrying the same type of long staff also topped by a cross. The carvings are traditionally ascribed to the 12th–13th century (Gerster 1970: pls. 79–80).

On the reverse of certain coins of King Armaḥ's reign, three crosses are shown, one large and two smaller, and below is an arch containing a form similar to an inverted keyhole (*fig. 31b*). Occasionally it is gilded (Munro-Hay 1995: 151, JJ180). Contemporary scholars believe that these three crosses represent the scene of the Crucifixion, while below, the Tomb of Christ is represented (Juel-Jensen 1990: 11). When the Byzantine Emperor, Heraclius, succeeded in regaining the Holy Cross and reinstating it in Jerusalem on 21 March 630, word of this sensation spread throughout the Christian world and engendered a response in terms of Ethiopian coinage. Apparently Armaḥ chose silver for the minting of his coins as a clear reference to Jerusalem. The architectural setting in the form of an arch was meant to symbolise the church of the Holy Sepulchre (Hahn 1999: 451–452).

The main conclusion of this detailed analysis of Aksumite coinage is the fact that the use of the Paw or patée form of the cross is clearly predominant, while Greek and Latin forms occur only occasionally. This also appears to have been the Italian scholar Anzani's conclusion.

Comparison of the above crosses found during excavations and represented on Aksumite coinage as well as pottery, only allows for certain preliminary conclusions. Although the basic form of the Aksumite crosses appears in some Byzantine crosses, the characteristic form of the Byzantine cross is one in which the horizontal arms are shorter than the vertical and their ends are concave, while small balls are located at the tip of each arm. An example of this is a 6th-century cross engraved on a plate in the collection of Russia's Hermitage Museum in St Petersburg, Inv. no. 62-641 (Bank 1977: *fig. 69*). Crosses of this type have not been found in Ethiopia, although similar crosses are recorded in Christian Nubia as well as in Coptic Egypt (Ratyński 1982: 228).

The results of the explorations relating to crosses in Aksum itself and in other Aksumite locations are relatively meagre in comparison with the plethora of material discovered in certain churches of Christian Nubia in the 1960s. Furthermore, the picto-

rial decoration in the Faras Cathedral and other churches explored at that time includes a profusion of various types of crosses (Ratyński 1982: 225, 256).

Also, the range of Coptic crosses is different from those in Ethiopia, and consists of two basic types: a cross with straight arms equal in length (Greek cross) set within a circle and the *crux ansata* or *ankh*, both of which were dominant in Coptic representations (Du Borguet 1971: VII, 2164), although patée crosses with in a circle are also known to exist (Ludwig 1980: nos. 7, 67).

Part II: Late-Aksumite Period, 8th- to 11th-Century Crosses

The negative results in terms of unearthing crosses after almost a century of excavations in Aksum and areas to the east towards the Red Sea might strengthen the belief held by scholars until fairly recently that all ancient Church objects must have been lost throughout the course of Ethiopia's turbulent history. Yet, the research undertaken during the past forty years, carried out in remote churches and monasteries, has revealed the existence of virtually unknown objects which could possibly be ascribed to earlier periods than had previously been deemed possible. One example would include long iron or bronze staffs topped with crosses – some of which might even originate from the late-Aksumite era. For an extended period, these failed to draw the attention of scholars, although they were found in relatively large quantities in church storerooms in Bāgemdār and particularly Təgray. Neck crosses originating from the same era are another possible example. A third example of these hitherto unknown objects of Ethiopian antiquity would include processional crosses.

Staffs Topped with Crosses

The 1955 Gondār Exhibition revealed the existence of staffs which – according to the labels accompanying them – belonged to the great figures of the Aksumite period in Ethiopian history. This assumption was based on the tradition held by monks and priests in the respective monasteries and churches from which the objects in question were brought to Gondār for this grand occasion. Although the black and white photographs of these objects taken at the time by Franz Graf von Magnis are not helpful in identifying

the material from which the staffs were made, some of the accompanying labels provide information. Most seem to have been cast from iron which was indicated in one label, and another was identified as silver. It is possible, however, that some were also cast in bronze. Usually they were ornamented with knobs.

In 2004, a great many similar staffs were discovered and photographed in colour in the churches and monasteries of Təgray. Nine staffs were part of the treasury of a single church known as Čärqos (St Cyriacus) in Ora Mäsqäl, Agamä. Although the priests serving this very ancient church knew virtually nothing about the original purpose or name and history of these artifacts, it was possible to ascertain that all of these staffs were made in one piece. While many were wrought from iron, some were cast in bronze and demonstrate a very advanced state of production. This aspect, however, also needs additional investigation. Their style displays a remarkable uniformity which is not devoid of a particular characteristic of certain crosses in that they all give the impression of being a reproduction in metal of the staffs which, at some earlier stage of evolution, were composed of a wooden or bamboo pole of variable length onto which an iron or bronze cross was affixed.

It is also noteworthy that with certain staffs, the lower arm of the cross clearly duplicates the shape of the shaft (*fig. 34*). All along the staffs at regular intervals there are numerous knots similar to those found in walking sticks (*fig. 35*). Some staffs have a spike at the bottom; others are flat. The crosses are of a very distinct type with the vertical arms measuring twice the length of the horizontal arms, which only slightly widen towards the tips. In the simplest crosses, the ends of the arms are flat and at their intersection there is an ornamental "x" form which seems to be a conscious attempt to suggest the string or leather fastening on the arms of the original cross from which this form was copied (*fig. 173*).

In more elaborate forms, the three arms have extended finials with variously shaped rounded forms at their ends and there is some linear ornamentation (*fig. 174*). There is only one example of a round cross which – when viewed against the light – produces the effect of a Greek cross. The staff of this particular cross was broken and its replacement added at a later date offered an example of ancient welding techniques (*fig. 36*). Claude Lepage pub-

lished a reference to a staff ornamented with brass encrustation which is in the possession of Amba Dära Mika'el Church in Aşbi district, and he has vaguely attributed it to the 13th–15th century (Lepage 1975: 76).

Unfortunately, the problem of dating this category of staffs remains an open question. Jacques Mercier designates them as *baṭrä* (*bäträ*) *mäsqäl* – meaning staff with the cross – an expression probably taken from local priests, and he asserts that “monks used them as walking sticks which they planted in the ground while they prayed or preached. Their shape echoes the knots on the bamboo crosses of the Desert Fathers of the early Christian period . . . The oldest of these may date to the 8th century, but certain forms continued to be produced until the 15th century” (Mercier 2001: 47–48). The French scholar probably had in mind staffs similar to those which were exhibited in 1955 at Gondär and he undoubtedly has seen many of them in churches during his travels in Tägray.

Nevertheless, the connection is evident between these staffs and those represented on late Aksumite coinage. Equally evident is the connection with Coptic pastoral staffs. The staffs found at Ora Mäsqäl are quite similar to the depiction of Coptic staffs found in the wall paintings of Deir Al-Chohada in the Esna Desert which originate from the beginning of the 12th century (Leroy 1975: 34, pls. 36–37) and they also bear a marked resemblance to the 11th-century wall paintings in the Red Sea Monastery of St Anthony (Zimbawo 2003: figs. 237, 239).

Equally striking is the similarity with the staffs found in Christian Nubian paintings. One example is that of Christ in Majesty holding a staff in the 12th-century Nubian wall paintings in Faras Cathedral (Michałowski 1974: 177–179) and a second is the Warrior Saint with a staff depicted in the Chapel at the Old Dongola Monastery excavated in Southern Sudan and ascribed to the same period (Jakobielski 2001: pl. 42).

At this stage of investigation it would be difficult to establish a precise period for the production and use of the staffs in question, and the 8th to 15th century dating suggested by Mercier seems to be somewhat tentative. It is interesting to note that Ethiopian hermits of today continue to carry these staffs while, on the other

hand, there is no clear indication of precisely when the practice was discontinued by Ethiopia's monks. What can be verified, however, through an examination of paintings, is that staffs topped with crosses were in use until at least the 15th century.

Neck Crosses

As with the problem of the date of origin and use of staffs topped with crosses, the question of pinpointing the origins of the tradition of wearing neck crosses is a matter of similar conjecture. David Buxton, a traveller of the late 1940s and 1950s, believed that bronze neck crosses were worn in the early centuries of Abyssinian Christianity. However, it appears that they fell out of use until Zär'a Ya'eqob insisted on a revival of the custom in the 15th century (Buxton 1970: 165). Although the earliest neck crosses are indeed made of bronze, further investigation is needed to date them more precisely, and the same is true in the case of the revival of the custom during the reign of Zär'a Ya'eqob. There is the possibility that certain neck crosses dating from the post-Aksumite era survived the passage of time. The crosses in question are few; some of them were excavated at Yəḥa (Anfray 1963: 188–192, pl. CLII) and one cross is in the collection of the IES in Addis Abäba (fig. 37). Although this particular cross was acquired in an antique shop in Addis Abäba, it very probably originates from Aksum. A bronze cross shows a clear similarity of form to the cross J.E. 2382 found in tomb no. 13 at Yəḥa, therefore the late-Aksumite period is suggested as the date of origin of this cross.

Processional (Blessing) Crosses

The earliest processional crosses appear to have been in the form of a circle and two such crosses are in the possession of Ora Mäsqäl Čärqos church (fig. 38). The priests there claim that one cross was donated to their church by a certain *ḥaṣay* Wäntä-Wädäm of whom they also have a 15th–16th-century copy of the land grant to the church in question. The inscription on the cross, however, reads: “This is a sign [of the cross] which I own, *nəguś* or king, Solomon, son of Murara, and my name is Tāntawäddäm”. The two last names appear in various forms in the lists of Zagwe rulers as compiled by traditional Church as well as European

scholars (Belaynesh 1975: 200–204). Although the genealogy of the dynasty is still uncertain, according to the latest attempts to establish the ascendancy of its rulers (Taddesse Tamrat: 1972: 56), the cross can be broadly ascribed to the late 11th or early 12th century.

The cross in question is cast in bronze and belongs to a particular variety designated *qärnä bägʿə* or Horn of the Lamb, because the sculpted head of the animal is variously integrated into the cross and in this case serves as its shaft. In fact, there are three processional crosses known in Ethiopia, each embellished by a sculpted ram's head. However, this particular cross is round, whereas the remaining two crosses are of different shapes. Its form and local tradition would suggest that this cross is the oldest of the three.

A second comparable cross is also cast in bronze together with the shaft and fully developed lower arms. In its centre, a deeply indented patée cross of the Maltese type is set in a circle, which, in turn, is surrounded by an intricate ribbon pattern. All along the outer edge of the cross, a pattern of perforated circles runs in between the three triangles, dividing them into sets of twelve and eight on each side of the cross. The figure of twelve is usually explained as symbolising the Twelve Apostles, but here they correspond more closely to the twenty-four Priests of Heaven (*fig. 39*). The date of origin of the cross is uncertain but its form and ornamentation appear to precede the characteristics of crosses attributed to the Zagʿe period.

Part III: Zagʿe Dynasty, 11th- to 13th-Century Crosses

This period was dominated by the rise and expansion of Islam which isolated Ethiopia from the Byzantine world. Following the decline and ultimate fall of the Aksumite state in the 10th century, the political centre shifted to the south – the area inhabited by the Kushitic Agäw people in the Wag and Lasta regions which were already part of the Aksumite state and heavily Christianised. In the late 11th or early 12th century, the new Zagʿe dynasty established itself in Adäfa, also known as Warwar or Roha and later named after its famed late 12th- to early 13th-century Zagʿe ruler Gäbrä Mäsqäl, whose royal name was Lalibäla and who is recognised as

a saint by the Ethiopian Church (Conti Rossini 1922: 295–296; 1928: 303–310; Taddesse Tamrat 1972: 55–57). During the same period, the Amhara speaking people of Təgrean origin pushed to the south bringing with them their own traditions of Christianity. Finally in the late 13th century with the rise of Aṣe Yəkuno Amlak, 1270–1285, the new dynasty which claimed to have descended from the Biblical King Solomon was established. Over the course of one hundred years, the Zagʿe rulers created a brilliant culture which left enduring art forms as part of their legacy – including the evolution of crosses. In paintings of the period, the earliest depictions of crosses offer a fairly accurate impression of their forms. These painted images, as well as the surviving crosses themselves, provide a credible basis for dating their forms to the period.

Hand Crosses

In two churches – Gännätä Maryam in Lasta and Waša Mikaʿel of Angot, an area south of Təgray which is in present-day Wällo – the existing wall paintings are definitively dated to the late 13th century. The first church is monolithic and was created by the order of Yəkuno Amlak. In his dedication portrayal, the ruler is accompanied by two ecclesiastics, Nəhyo Bäkrastos and Mähʿari-Amlak. Nəhyo is identified by the inscription as the ruler's agent for building the church (Getatchew Haile 1987: 3–4). A second cave-type church was also built during the reign of Yəkuno Amlak and this, too, is affirmed by an inscription. Five paintings in the church were commissioned by the above-mentioned Mähʿari-Amlak. They include his portrayal together with two of his contemporaries – Her-Amlak, a scribe, and Nəwayä-Krastos, a *šəyyum* or high-ranking regional chief.

Jacques Mercier, who had reproductions published of the paintings found in Waša Mikaʿel church, appropriately suggested a stylistic affinity between the paintings adorning the walls of both churches (Mercier 2002: 143). The third church, Mädhane ʿAläm or Redeemer of the World, is constructed inside a large cavern on the eastern slope of Mäkinä Mountain and situated relatively close to Gännätä Maryam. This church is ornamented with paintings in a similar style to those in the other two churches and can reason-

ably be ascribed to the same period (Gerster 1970: 109–113; Balicka-Witakowska 2004: 9–29).

Most of the historic figures depicted in these churches are shown holding hand crosses irrespective of their ecclesiastical or lay status. In Gännätä Maryam, as a member of the clergy, Nəḥyo Bäkrəstos is shown carrying a hand cross, as is Mäh'ari-Amlak in Waša Mika'el in keeping with their status as members of the clergy. In the same wall paintings, however, a high official and a scribe are depicted carrying similar crosses, contrary to the commonly held belief that this privilege was strictly reserved for ecclesiastics. Mercier, therefore, had doubts whether the depictions of crosses were purely for ornamental purposes, as is the case with nimbi adorning all figures in Gännätä Maryam, as well as those in Waša Mika'el and Mäkinä Mādḥane 'Alām (Mercier 2002: 145).

The journals of Alvares, however, serve to dispel any doubts by noting that not only priests and monks but also people of high nobility carried crosses (Alvares 1961: 516). In 1520, Alvares wrote that Ləbnä Dəngəl granted an audience to the Portuguese shortly after their arrival at the royal camp in Šäwa. The ruler and his court were under a rich dais, and he was seated on a throne and holding "a silver cross . . ." (Alvares 1961: 303). When one year later Ləbnä Dəngəl visited the church of Mäkanä Šəllase in the historic Amhara region where his father was buried, Alvares wrote that the king travelled "with his crown on his head and a cross in his hand as always" (Alvares 1961: 338). Further corroborating evidence of this is later given by Jesuit missionary Barradas, who wrote in the early 17th century: "The other friars and priests carry hand crosses, but smaller ones, as do some of the secular noblemen" (Barradas 1996: 140). The question remains. Has the cross borne in the royal hand a special significance?

Another Jesuit missionary, Manuel de Almeida, who also spent a number of years in Ethiopia during the same period, left an extensive description of the country and confirmed what Alvares and Barradas had written. Moreover, he gives an explanation for the custom. Although it was customary for the rulers to carry a small cross in their hands, they did not carry it as a sign of empire, but as a sign that they were deacons of the church, an office which they all, and most of the lords, acquired so as not to remain outside

the curtains within the church, like the laity . . . but instead would be granted the privilege of going inside and communicating with the clergy (Beckingham 1954: 71).

It appears, therefore, that the cross carried by kings and nobility was largely a mark of social status and privilege, and the Waša Mika'el depiction of the high official and scribe holding crosses is a visual record of an old custom as well as a proof that it was practised as far back as the 13th century. It is of special significance that a similar custom was practised on special occasions at the Nubian royal court, where the king, princes and pages all carried crosses. Michael, the Syrian, describes the young king, George (Kirki, Kurki) on his way to Bagdad in 836. He was riding a camel, carried a sceptre in one hand and a cross in the other. On his right and left, the Nubians, who were on foot, all carried small crosses, which were believed to be golden (Vantini 1970: 42–43).

The crosses in Gännätä Maryam, Waša Mika'el and Mäkinä Mādḥane 'Alām show a close affinity to those in *Nəguś* Armaḥ coinage and most are of the patée type, (Ia) form, of the Aksumite cross classification. In some crosses, their arms are distinctly flared, at times giving the impression of three triangles joined at their narrowest point, as demonstrated in the Waša Mika'el depictions of crosses in the hands of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel and St Cyriacus (Mercier 2002: figs. 1–2, 7). In other crosses, the arms are straight and only flare at their extremities, like the cross of Nəwayä Krestos in Waša Mika'el (Mercier 2002: figs. 8, 5c) and the cross carried by a figure presumed to be K'əleşewon, son of the king (*fig. 40*) (Balicka-Witakowska 2004: fig. 38). We find the closest analogy to such crosses in Hataz coins (Munro-Hay 1995: 140, JJ84). In Waša Mika'el, the cross of the scribe Her-Amlak remains the potent type of cross. However, the vertical and horizontal arms at their transversal ends are slender (Mercier 2002: figs. 8, 5b). A similar cross is that of St Barbara depicted in Mäkinä Mādḥane 'Alām (*fig. 41*) (Balicka-Witakowska 2004: fig. 23). The cross resembles the cross in an Aksumite coin designated as a "Crutch Cross" (Juel-Jensen 1990: 2, fig. 7).

In the Mäkinä Mādḥane 'Alām paintings, a new type of hand cross with graduating ends appears in the hands of two of the Five Wise Virgins (*fig. 42*) (Gerster 1970: fig. 108; Balicka-Witakows-

ka 2004: fig. 14). In Gännätä Maryam, this type of cross was used as an ornamentation pattern, but it does not seem to have a counterpart in Aksumite coinage.

In Gännätä Maryam, the crosses depicted as an object generally belong to the same category as those in Waša Mika'el. St Cyriacus (Qirqos) is depicted in both churches holding a similar cross with a long handle (*fig. 175*) and both paintings are definitely patterned on the same model. The cross with a short handle carried by St Mamas (*fig. 176*) and the one which the hermit and martyr *Abba* Hor is holding (Gerster 1970: fig. 14) are similar to that carried by Archangel Mika'el in Waša Mika'el, while a clearly patée fitted type of cross can be seen in the depiction of the saintly monk in Gännätä Maryam (*fig. 44*). In the depiction of the Entry into Jerusalem, the Apostles carry crosses with elongated lower arms which are characteristically straight close to their intersection and only flare to form points at their extremities (Gerster 1970: 118, fig. 148).

In Gännätä Maryam, Waša Mika'el and Mäkinä Mädhane 'Alām churches, the hand crosses are usually depicted with the lower vertical arm missing and the handle directly attached to the middle of the cross or occasionally with the lower vertical arm and the handle attached to it. The reason behind this is not obvious and might be due to the artist's lack of attention to detail. Furthermore, the handles are either short and the cross and the handle are depicted within the figure holding it, or they are long and extend beyond the figure with the cross appearing over his left shoulder. In Mäkinä Mädhane 'Alām, generally the crosses depicted are of the second type. This difference probably reflects the two different types of crosses in use at the time. Also, the square or rectangular base at the lower extremity of the handles is missing in all the crosses. This corresponds to the prevalent characteristic feature of cross handles, which were either pointed or flat.

In Gännätä Maryam, two angels hold crosses with the lower vertical arm distinctly longer than the upper and the handles four to five times the length of the cross. These could essentially be termed as staffs topped with crosses (*fig. 43*). Finally, all the crosses described are depicted in black, which strongly suggests that, at the time, the majority of hand crosses were made of iron, and the

depictions of hand crosses in the above three churches reflect with reasonable precision the kind of cross which was in general use during the 12th and 13th century, while, for the most part, their forms are still a continuation of the crosses on Aksumite coinage.

Among the few hand crosses which are still in existence and could be possibly ascribed to the same period is a cross which the monks of Däbrä Bānkol, also Bank'ol, claim to have belonged to *Abunä Madhāninä Egzi'*, the founder of the monastery. This sacred object consists of an 11th- to 13th-century iron staff topped with a cross whose lower half was cut off, but no square base has been added. This particular cross has obviously had a dramatic past as – at some point – its right arm was also broken (*fig. 177*). The cross shows some affinity to that of Her-Amlak depicted in Waša Mika'el.

Another example is a cross in the IES Museum which was reproduced in an article by Claude Lepage (Lepage 1975: 74). The barbed cross is forged from iron as one piece, 36.3 cm long, and its vertical arms are twice as long as the horizontal. They are flat at their ends, and at their intersection there is an ornamental "x" form already found on the Ora Mäsqäl staffs topped with crosses (*fig. 35*). The handle is ornamented with two ringed joints which are reminiscent of a bamboo stem. The lower end of the handle is similarly rounded, suggesting that it could be a formative step towards the typically large base which later became characteristic of Ethiopian hand crosses in general.

Processional (Blessing) Crosses

Throughout the period in question and probably during the centuries closely preceding it, processional crosses evolved into rich and striking forms. One of these forms was the round cross of which two examples are found in Ora Mäsqäl Čärqos. In addition, round processional crosses in bas-relief decorate the walls of two reputedly early rock-hewn churches in Tağray. One is the church of *Abraha Ašbəha* situated in Wuqro Region and the second is Čärqos church found in Wuqro itself. It may be reasonably assumed that the white plaster bas-reliefs are contemporary to the origins of both churches. However, a precise dating of these two churches remains uncertain. French scholar Claude Lepage has

suggested the age of Abrəha Ašbəha to be from the 10th to 12th century, and this is most probably the case. The same might also be true of Wuqro Čärqos, although Ruth Plant, a British historian of architecture, tentatively ascribed it to the 6th or 7th century (Plant 1985: 91).

A Greek cross surrounded by a circle – and this time intaglio – is located in Däbrä Šəyon Maryam in Gäraltä and has been ascribed to the 14th century (*fig. 45*). In all churches, the crosses and staffs are carved with great precision which would make the bas-reliefs a faithful reproduction of the processional crosses actually used during the period.

In Wuqro Čärqos, the crosses in question are carved on the pilaster on the southern wall of the church. They are patée type crosses with arms concave at their ends and surrounded with a ring which is set on a long staff (*fig. 46*). The form is strongly reminiscent of Coptic crosses (Ludwig 1980: 7) and at the same time it gives the impression of the liturgical fans used in the Coptic Church (Basilios 1971: V, 1473–1474).

In Abrəha Ašbəha, there are two carved bas-reliefs, one on the pilaster found on the western wall of the church and the second at the entrance from the vestibule to the church itself. Each represents the patée type cross and has two fish facing each other at the top of its vertical arm and the palmette pattern is evocative of Islamic art (Gerster 1970: 134, *fig. 184*). The fish were probably meant to portray dolphins (*fig. 25*) which are an allegory of salvation, inspired by an ancient legend describing them as a friend of man (Cirlot 1962: 81–82). In the same church, two other bas-relief crosses surrounded by a circle are very similar to the one in Wuqro Čärqos church. Furthermore, the existence of the motif in Abrəha Ašbəha church has a relative bearing on the crosses of the so-called Lalibäla style.

During this period or even before, a particular kind of processional cross evolved which was in the form of a patée cross with short side arms similar to those that appear on the late Aksum coinage of Armaḥ (*fig. 171*), except for semi-circular forms projecting from the middle of the finials. A characteristic feature is the missing frame and the supporting lower arms and they generally are produced from hammered iron. One such cross is in the col-

lection of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Abäba and its date of origin is broadly estimated to be from the 12th to 14th century (Moore 1971: 12, *fig. 3*). Similar crosses were produced during the same period, but with supporting arms added at the bottom (*fig. 47*) and they continued to be produced during the following centuries as evidenced by the cross ascribed to the 15th century in the IES collection (Moore 1971: 45, *fig. 32*).

Another sub-category includes crosses which are similarly without a frame and their straight arms have gently and, at times, distinctly flared ends. Their divided ends curve out and back into tapering tips similar to those of the moline cross. The horizontal arms are characteristically short and in between the tips of the vertical and horizontal arms are relatively large patée crosslets. At the bottom are additional lower arms supporting the whole cross. Such crosses are usually made of bronze similar to the one in the IES collection, Addis Abäba (Moore 1971: 15, *fig. 5*). They also were made of iron like the cross in Däbrä Šärabi located in the region of Aksum (*fig. 48*). Unfortunately, its lower arm is missing. The cross is ornamented with incisions of various geometric designs and features the characteristic “x” where the arms intersect. At the top of the finials and within the circular frame there are small patée crosses which are similar to those on the late Armaḥ coinage. Another similar cross is situated in Däbrä Abba Gärima, in the Adwa region in Təgray, and is probably made of silver. The flared ends of the arms are distinctly curved while large patée crosslets adorn the tips of the finials. The ends of its lower arms with small perforations at the top are bent downwards, and give the impression of a bird’s head (*fig. 49*).

The crosses in both categories are undated. However, they fit well into the suggested period from the 12th to 14th century, according to the chronology by Eine Moore, who applied names to various types of processional crosses (Moore 1971).

The major difficulty with the category designated as Lalibäla crosses is that virtually none bear inscriptions or any indications which would help in establishing their date of origin and place of production with any certainty. The existence of about twelve such crosses in the Lalibäla churches is not a definitive proof that they were produced in Lasta. Similar crosses have been in the store-

rooms of certain churches and monasteries of Təgray for a similar length of time and it is therefore equally possible that they could have been manufactured in Northern Ethiopia. Moreover, a detailed survey of this specific type of cross has yet to be undertaken. Consequently any suggestions about them must be considered as very tentative and for this reason the following is mainly based on crosses still found *in situ*.

In the previously mentioned Ora Mäsqäl Čärqos church are two crosses which belong to the so-called Lalibäla group by virtue of their main characteristics, which include an elongated pear-shaped frame and the ornamental pattern running along its outer rim. They also bear a certain resemblance to the round processional cross in the same church.

The first cross (*fig. 50*) has inscriptions engraved on both faces, which in itself is an unusual feature. One reveals the mystery of Christ's death on the cross "so that we may be forgiven" and the second, "so that we can have hope". Its single horse-shoe frame has a looped band decoration along its outer rim. The frame is supported by the lower arms and at their junction there is the figure of a bird's head with clearly delineated eyes and beak as well as perforated crosslets attached to their lower arms. At the top of the frame, a simple triangular form divides the looped band ornamentation into two sets of six, which is a common feature of this type of cross. A similar detail is found in the cross in Dəngəlat Maryam church in Haramat, Təgray. Printed reproductions were published by British scholar Juel-Jensen, who ascribed it to the 12th–13th century (Juel-Jensen 1975: 96, figs. 62–63), while Claude Lepage has dated it to the 14th or 15th century (Lepage 1975: 23).

In the second Ora Mäsqäl cross (*fig. 51*), there is a double arched frame with circles divided into two sets of nine on the outer frame and a zig-zag pattern between the two frames. At the top of the cross, an intricate ornamentation includes the heads of two birds and a small cross set within two curved forms. At the bottom, the frame turns into an inverted U form bent downwards with small crosslets attached to its tips and the lower arms are L-shaped.

In both Ora Mäsqäl crosses, the inner cross is of the patée type with its horizontal arms distinctly shorter than the vertical.

The upper arm in the first cross is unusually long and wide and in the second, the lower arm is elongated. The latter configuration which has a distinctly Latin cross character is also found in the cross treasured in the Golgotha Church in Lalibäla as well as the cross reputed to have been owned by Lalibäla located in Mädhane Alam church in the same region (*fig. 52*).

In Abba Yoḥanni Monastery (*gädam*) or Däbrä Asa in Tämben, there are two crosses of the so-called Lalibäla style. In one of them, the arch is wide with four crosses within, one of them is a patée cross, two of them appear to be Greek crosses set in a circle and one is Latin, and the bird's heads are shown at the bottom of the frame (*fig. 53*). The same pattern is applied to the processional cross which is treasured at Däbrä Ma'ar also called *Abunä Gäbrä Mäsqäl* (or Maryam) (*fig. 54*). The arch, however, was greatly expanded and it includes an elaborate ornamentation extending along the top which includes two sets of twenty-four forms each resembling the heads of pins. Within the arch the patée cross is similar to those in Ora Mäsqäl crosses, while the curving forms of the necks of birds and their heads serve as support for the arch in which there is a cross showing some affinity to the first Däbrä Asa cross.

In the second Däbrä Asa cross, there are three central crosses, two are set in ovals and one in a circle. All three crosses, however, have straight arms and have clearly evolved from Greek crosses (*fig. 26*). The singular feature which renders both the Ora Mäsqäl crosses and one Däbrä Asa cross different from all other crosses found in Lalibäla is that the curling projections are missing. In Lalibäla crosses, these projections appear on both sides below the arched form and their number varies from one to three. They have attracted the attention of travellers, collectors and scholars, who saw in their patterning either an ornamental interpretation of bird's heads (Gerster 1970: 101, figs. 77–78) or a fish motif (Doresse 1971: 557–566; Lepage 1975: 76).

An additional argument is provided by the cross preserved in Betä Giyorgis in Lalibäla, which includes in its ornamentation the form of a fish as well as of a bird's head (*fig. 178*), similar to that found in Ora Mäsqäl Čärqos. It is clear, therefore, that the creators of these crosses made a distinction between the two. This gives ad-

ditional support to the supposition of the existence of two centres for the production of these crosses: in one centre, the form of a fish (dolphin) was as an important element of ornamentation and in the second centre, it was a bird.

Turning to the upper part of the frame, this evolved from the curve of an arch in Coptic funerary monuments (Doresse 1971: 562–563) and Lepage and Mercier see in it a vaguely termed “antique triumphal arch” (Lepage 1975: 77; Mercier 2001: 48). The two separate ornamental elements – the funerary arch and the dolphin – were creatively integrated by Ethiopian craftsmen into a fluid form, but who conceived it and precisely how it occurred will likely remain an eternal mystery. It is clear, however, that the artisans who produced the Ora Mäsqäl crosses were influenced by the pattern of a Coptic funerary arch, but not by the dolphin motif and the same is true of one cross in the possession of the Abba Yoḥanni Monastery.

The third example of adaptation from foreign sources consists of Christ’s monogram in Greek above the Crucifixion engraved on the cross in the possession of Maryam Dəngəlat in Haramat. Christ is shown wearing a loin cloth which is similar to those in 14th- or 15th-century paintings of the Crucifixion. A similar cross with an engraved Crucifixion was long treasured in Dima Giyorgis church in Goḡgam, but at present is located in the Mäqāle Museum. Mercier, who published a reproduction of the cross, ascribes it to the 12th–13th century (Mercier 2000: 71). Finally, a primitively engraved figure of Christ on the Cross depicting Him wearing the collobium or long-sleeved tunic is part of the collection of the IES Museum, Addis Abāba, although its place of origin remains unknown (Moore 1971: 17–19, figs. 7–8).

These are foreign cultural currents which influenced the formation of this particular type of cross, while the bird pattern and leaf-like forms were locally integrated in the process of giving the cross its final shape. The evolutionary process must have taken an extended period and there is no doubt that it took place in more than one centre, with Northern Ethiopia being among the foremost. Also there are several variations which developed from these basic elements of cross formation. One particularly successful variation is the cross with its finials being the combination of

small crosses and forms of dolphins, all integrated into the design (Gerster 1970: pl. 78; Lepage 1975: 77; Mann 2001: 79).

Ultimately, the problem of more precisely dating these crosses remains unresolved. Eine Moore believes that they are generally dated to the Zagʷe dynasty (Moore 1971: 17). Taking into account the fact that at least one example still exists in each of the Lalibāla churches, it is a clear indication of their extensive production and availability during the period. The 12th- to 13th-century dating was thus generally accepted by most scholars, although with some hesitant suggestions of the 14th or 15th century (Lepage 1975: 23). Gerster, on the other hand, describes a certain cross in Lalibāla as made of brass (Gerster 1970: 101) which would place it in the 15th century. If, in fact, there is little reason to doubt the on-going production of this type of cross after the fall of the Zagʷe dynasty, the same could also be said about their production well before its establishment.

Compelling evidence of another kind was the discovery in the 1960s of two damaged crosses during the cleaning of the residual dirt in a deep pit which had originally been a pool cut into the rock in front of Betä Gäbrəʾel in Lalibāla. One cross was unquestionably of the aforementioned type, despite the fact that it had been heavily damaged by fire (*fig. 56*), while the second, which was also in a damaged condition, was of a type hardly recorded in Lalibāla churches, but its origins were obviously ancient (*fig. 180*). Around 1943, during the construction of St Mary’s church in Säbata, close to Addis Abāba, a similar cross was unearthed. It was part of a set of church paraphernalia hidden by the Christian population at the time when the area was invaded by animist Oromo. The date of the origin of both these crosses pre-dates the 16th century.

The discovery of two burned crosses in Lalibāla raises the question of why these sacred objects were burned or broken and thrown into a pit. One of the theories advanced is that it was part of a “systematic destruction of the past on religious grounds” which – according to Ethiopian scholar Getatchew Haile – occurred during the early years of Yəkuno Amlak’s late 13th-century restoration of the Solomonic dynasty (Getatchew Haile 1985: 41). Thus the two crosses which are now part of the Betä Maryam

treasury would be a tangible basis for dating the so-called Lali-bäla crosses.

Staffs and Spears Topped with Crosses

On the western wall of Gännätä Maryam church, three figures of important people of the period are represented together. According to the inscription, one is K^wäleṣewon, depicted on horseback and designated as the son of the king, and the second is a seated woman identified as Təḥrəyännä(?). The third figure is a standing woman, however her name was not deciphered on the legend. She is holding a long staff topped by a cross. The length of the staff corresponds to the height of the woman, while the barbed cross with three arms ending with small triangular finials (*fig. 77*) looks very similar to those on the tops of staffs still in existence in the monasteries and churches of Təgray (*fig. 179*). In the same church, on a spear held by St Mercurius or Marqoryos shown slaying Julian the Apostate, there is an entirely new type of patée (Ia) fitted cross with semicircular protrusions at the end of each arm (*fig. 55*). Similarly in Mäkinä Mädhane 'Alām, one of the Wise Virgins carries a cross with small spheres at the ends of its arms. The continuation of the Aksumite tradition is illustrated by the fifth form (Ie) of the typology of Aksumite crosses which is extensively used in the ornamentation of churches in Lalibäla, particularly Betä Mikä'el and Golgotha, in bas-reliefs showing figures with staffs topped with crosses (Gerster 1970: figs. 79–80; Gervers 2003: figs. 7, 9–10, 15). The standing figures are wearing huge turbans, while all inscriptions accompanying them were clearly added at a later date (Gerster 1970: 101, figs. 79–80). According to Canadian scholar, Michael Gervers, the form of the turbans would indicate the 15th century as the date of the origin of these bas-reliefs (Gervers 2003: 43–44). This, however, is still under discussion.

Finally, in the book of Gospels copied in 1280–1281 (Taddeesse Tamrat 1972: 90–91), the portrayal of Iyäsus Mo'a, a great figure in Ethiopia's monastic history, depicts him carrying a long staff topped with a cross. It seems likely that it was painted black to indicate that it was made of iron (*fig. 94*). The staff also bears a marked similarity to that of Armah's in his coinage. The above examples all serve to indicate that the Aksumite tradition of the

cross-topped staff was continued during and even after the end of the Zag^we period.

Part IV: 14th-, 15th- and Early 16th-Century Crosses

The new Solomonic dynasty consolidated its rule throughout central and northern Ethiopia and widely extended the kingdom towards the west and south. Under the energetic leadership of Am-dä-Şəyon, 1314–1344, Dawit II, 1380–1413, and Yəshaq, 1413–1430, the conquests included the present province of Goḡgam, all the territory around Lake Tana and the territories south of the Awaš River, the lands around Lake Zway, and to the south-west and south, including the large region of Bali. During this period, the advances of the Islamic sultanates from the east were held in check. This expansion of the Christian state was closely followed by the evangelisation of all new areas and the establishment of many monasteries and churches throughout the whole kingdom.

The expansion of the Church was also marked by internal conflict. However, this was brought to a halt under the reign of the reformer ruler Zär'a Ya'əqob, 1434–1468. Culturally, the period is characterised by the extraordinary development of religious literature and art, as well as by the first significant contacts with the Christian West and the earliest written records on crosses and their use. Although the production of crosses – especially during the 14th and 15th century – was evidently abundant and many processional crosses as well as a substantial number of hand crosses are still in existence, relatively few neck crosses of the period have survived.

Neck Crosses

Like the Copts, Ethiopians adopted the custom of wearing neck crosses, but while the Copts reproduced them in their paintings, sculptures and textiles, they did not depict them in paintings until the 20th century. As to written records relating to neck crosses, fortunately Alvares included some information about the custom during the course of his stay in Ethiopia.

Most probably these crosses had been carved from African ebony found growing in Northern Ethiopia. These crosses evidently proved to be a popular item among the newly-arrived Por-

tuguese who, according to Alvares, purchased large numbers of them from Ethiopians (Alvares 1961: 58).

After returning to Portugal, Alvares elaborated on the subject and he wrote about “the common people wearing small crosses around their necks”, but it is not clear from his text whether priests, monks and people of the ruling class did the same (Alvares 1961: 516). Extraordinarily, however, none of these wooden crosses described by Alvares has ever been found.

Regarding the possible existence of metal crosses of the same period, scholars have long remained dubious, while most of the private collectors were more interested in searching for silver crosses, which they considered more valuable than the crosses made of non-precious materials. In 2000, Jacques Mercier published reproductions of a set of five copper neck crosses owned by a private collector and defined them as the “oldest ever found” with a suggested date of origin from the 15th–17th century (Mercier 2000: 78).

In fact, there are approximately two dozen similar crosses in existence today in public and private collections. A few neck crosses of this kind are preserved in the IES Museum, Addis Abāba. Among them there are some made of copper and they are believed to originate from the 14th to 15th century. They are miniatures of the processional crosses of the period and this particular feature is the reason for ascribing them to the same period – a fact which was also noted by Mercier. They are close copies of processional crosses, with the staff incorporated into the attachment for threading a cord from which the miniature cross may be suspended. Two rings on either side reflect the lower arms of the processional crosses on which the protective cloth is hung.

One of these crosses, IES Mus. 6722 (*fig. 57*), is a miniature copy of a processional cross with a diamond framework and a pattern of interwoven squares (Moore 1971: 27–28, *fig. 18*). Its possible date of origin is the 14th to 15th century. A second cross, IES Mus. 4872 (*fig. 58*), is a copy of the early crosses with a quatrefoil frame. Moore dated them to the 13th–14th century (Moore 1971: 29–31), but 15th-century copies are definitely feasible. The intricate pattern of the original cross is somewhat stylised in the copy, but the basic shape is well reproduced.

Another exceptional neck cross, IES Mus. 5182, was inspired by the hand crosses as they were depicted in the paintings of Yāddābā Maryam and in the Ḥayq painted strip, except for the handle which was replaced by a ring (*fig. 59*). A 15th- or early 16th-century date of origin is possible. The compact form, however, was widely used as ornamental design in Ethiopian art dating back to the Aksumite era (DAE 1913: II, 9, Abb. 142). Two crosses fashioned from copper or bronze in the Ethnologisches Museum in Sankt Agustin, Germany, HVKmus3000299 and HVKmus300300, belong to the same category of rare early neck crosses. Although they are undated in the catalogue of the Museum, they probably originate from the 16th and 17th century (Marx 2001: 173–174).

Cross Pendants

In the Ambassāl Psalter on fol. 137v, St Anthony of the Desert is depicted wearing on his breast a small square wooden tablet adorned with a design featuring two crosses. One is painted ochre red and the design is that of a patée type cross. Over this, there is a black straight-armed cross with elongated horizontal arms (*fig. 60*). The tablet seems to be attached by a large white cord which also encircles the tablet. If the identification of the drawing is correct, this would be an early depiction of a devotional pendant cross similar to those few found today in Ethiopian churches and in collections outside the country. Two of these were reproduced in a publication by Marilyn Heldman (Heldman 1993: 91, cat. 1). The form evolved from the short-armed cross, but the arms are rounded and both tips are tapered and curved. All surfaces are filled with engraved figures. The hollowed hangers are typically chevron-shaped. Two such crosses are situated at Wuqēñ Gäbrä’el church in Tāmben. One is made of gilt silver.

On the obverse face of the silver cross (*fig. 61*), there is the figure of the Virgin Mary with her son, whom she holds on her left arm. On the reverse an unidentified figure is pointing with one hand at the image of Mary and accompanied with the inscription “By the power of Zion”. Zion stands for St Mary, but there is an additional meaning that indicates the church of St Mary of Zion at Aksum (Shiferaw Bekele, personal communication, 22 April 2005, from Addis Abāba).

The second cross is made of brass (*fig. 62*). On the obverse there are the figures of the Virgin Mary and the Child surrounded by the Twelve Apostles and two Archangels. On the reverse, a warrior saint, probably Theodore, is engraved killing a snake. He is surrounded by four Evangelists and probably two young Apostles. On the right is shown *Abunä Abib*, also named *Abba Bula* (Budge 1928: 189–191). Each figure is holding a cross. The style and the choice of subjects suggests the middle of the 15th century.

There is also a privately-owned pendant cross made of a single piece of brass that is similar in style, but cruder in execution. An inscription indicates that “the picture belongs to Gäbrä Krastos”. The cross possibly dates to the late 15th or early 16th century. Both faces are replete with engraved figures. On one face (*fig. 63a*) in the middle, there is a figure which – according to the inscription – is a picture of Mary with her beloved Child. She appears to carry him on her left arm. In turn, on his left, there is another female figure flanked by two Archangels, Mik[a’el] and Gäbrä’el, which also seems to represent the Virgin Mary, but with the Child missing. Curiously, the figure has two left hands. If this interpretation is correct, the configuration would be virtually unique in the early iconography of Mary. Images of St Luke the Evangelist and St Mark are engraved on the left and right respectively. The Patriarchs Abraham, Jacob and Isaac are engraved at the bottom. This is unquestionably an atypical 15th-century iconic image of the Virgin without the Child. On the second face, are the figures of Moses, Aaron and Joshua as well as those of the Twelve Apostles (*fig. 63b*).

Hand Crosses

The earliest record of hand crosses in European documents dates to 1404. A certain Italian ecclesiastic residing in Rome described having seen Ethiopian pilgrims carrying small iron crosses (Lazarini 1924: 842). This is confirmed by the testimony of Dominican monk Pietro Ranzano. In his work *Annales Omnium Temporum*, he writes that while in Naples he met the Italian traveller Pietro Rombulo, who had spent thirty-seven years in Ethiopia in the service of kings before returning to Italy in 1450. Ranzano duly recorded the information passed on to him by Rombulo and not-

ed in his own commentaries that the Ethiopians were true Christians “who carry crosses in their hands” (Knefelkamp 1986: 78).

Hand crosses were also displayed during the ceremonial offering of gifts to the Church. In his Book of Light, Zär’a Ya’eqob listed the offerings which people should bring to their churches. The priests would then emerge from the sanctuary carrying the cross and reciting the prayer of thanksgiving (Conti Rossini 1965: 24).

One century later, Alvares recorded that “all the priests, monks, and lords carry crosses in their hands, both on foot and on horseback” (Alvares 1961: 516) and described several particular occasions when they were used and displayed. One occasion was during negotiations. In April 1520, when the Portuguese landed in Məşəwwa, the captain of the flotilla met the *baḥər nägaš*, governor of the territories adjacent to the Red Sea. In the course of discussions concerning the Embassy’s passage to the Ethiopian court, the governor took a cross “which was there for that purpose . . . and said that he swore on the sign of the cross . . . that he would always favour . . . and assist the men [emissaries] and affairs of the king of Portugal . . .” (Alvares 1961: 60). Two weeks later, when the members of the Embassy reached Däbrä Bizän, a great monastery on the eastern escarpment close to Məşəwwa, and found that the Abbot was temporarily absent, the monks asked the Portuguese to remain there and await his return. They also requested them to take an oath on the crucifix that they would comply with this request (Alvares 1961: 74).

During the commemorative procession at Däbrä Bizän in memory of Abba Filəpos, 1323–1404, founder of the monastery, Alvares wrote: “The monks carried fifty small crosses of silver of poor workmanship . . .” (Alvares 1961: 89). In November 1520, shortly after their arrival at the royal camp, the Portuguese Embassy was received at an impressive ceremony. Ləbnä Dəngəl wore a crown and was seated on a richly adorned platform with a silver cross in his hand (Alvares 1961: 303). The cross was apparently of great interest to the Portuguese. According to European writings of the Medieval era, the bearing of a hand cross was attributed to the mythical ruler Prester John, while, in fact, it was customary for all the kings of Ethiopia to carry crosses.

The Acts of Märḥä Krəstos describe Zär'a Ya'əqob's method of choosing the Abbot of Däbrä Libanos, a highly elevated ecclesiastic position which included the privilege of being the head of all the monks in Ethiopia. Zär'a Ya'əqob asked each of the four candidates to lend him their own "crosses for blessing", which were undoubtedly hand crosses. These were then placed on the altar of the royal oratory and kept there for thirty days. Each day two different messengers went to the church, one to select the cross of his choice, and the second to return it. Each time, the cross selected proved to be the cross belonging to Märḥä Krəstos. Believing that this was the sign of a miraculous intervention, Zär'a Ya'əqob appointed Märḥä Krəstos to be the head of the monastery (Kur 1972: 38–39, 87–89). Although the story appears to be the chronicler's pious invention and the ingenious method was not recorded in any other sources, it confirms the information by Alvares about each monk having his own cross and using it for giving blessings. The transferral of the position of the head of a monastery was symbolised by the cross belonging to his predecessor – probably a benediction cross – being handed down to the successor (Raineri 1983: 614).

A cross was also traditionally displayed during the ceremony of baptism. Alvares records that he baptised the newly born child of Pietro Cordiero, a Genovese living in Ethiopia. Alvares performed the ritual "according to our [Portuguese] custom" but, "at this baptism we held a cross uplifted, because such is their custom" (Alvares 1961: 319–320). This cross was almost certainly a hand cross, as it is the type of cross still used by priests on similar occasions in present day Ethiopia.

Alvares was also present when Abunä Marcos, head of the Church at that time, performed a marriage ceremony. "The bride and bridegroom," he wrote, "were seated on a catre [trundle bed] and the Abima [abunä] walked around them with incense and a cross and laid his hands on their heads" (Alvares 1961: 107).

Another occasion which involved the use of hand crosses was the conferring of holy orders. During the lengthy ceremony which began with the examination of the candidates, the *abunä* sat in a tent. He first placed his hand on the head of each candidate passing before him, and then read the prescribed text while con-

tinuously making the sign of the cross over the candidates with his benediction cross (Alvares 1961: 350–351), which would undoubtedly have been made of some type of metal.

Turning to the depictions of hand crosses in 14th-century paintings, they offer evidence of the transition from handles with a base which was either pointed or flat to those with a square or rectangular base. An example of the continuation of the former is the miniature in the Gospel of Krəstos-Täsfanä, fourth abbot of Däbrä Ḥayq, painted during his lifetime and apparently his personal copy (Taddese Tamrat 1970: 98, fig. on p. 94). It can thus be ascribed with confidence to the early decades of the 14th century. The first three heads of the monastery and a certain Gäbrä Ṣəyon are depicted each holding a small iron cross with a relatively short handle that was smooth at the bottom (fig. 64).

Evidence of the new form with a square or rectangular base as well as of the use of wood for cross production is provided by an exceptionally realistic depiction of hand crosses and one staff topped with a cross found in a privately-owned Psalter in a collection in Ambassäl, Wällo, EMMML, no. 2064. Getatchew Haile and W.F. Macomber who catalogued the Psalter have suggested the 14th century as the probable date of its origin (Getatchew Haile 1982: VI, 126–130) while another Ethiopian scholar, Sergew Hable-Selassie, favours either the end of the 14th or the beginning of the 15th century (private communication). The transition from depicting subjects' faces from a frontal to a three-quarter position reinforces his dating. The miniatures depict the Apostles and saints in emulation of Coptic and Near Eastern hagiography each holding a cross in his right hand, and either a book of the Gospels or a container for the holy oil in his left hand.

The artist obviously had depicted the crosses precisely as he had seen them. They appear to be carved from one piece of wood, a material which dictated less complex forms than those of metal crosses, particularly in view of their expanded volume and the flatness of their extremities. The length of the cross itself is usually equal to that of the handle and the base.

Seven crosses depicted on fols. 7v, 14v, 22v, 31, 38v, 44v and 53v are plain (fig. 65) and four crosses on fols. 64v, 72r, 72v, 78r have ornamentation which is probably a copy of the same incised

pattern in real crosses (*fig. 95*). Similar cross ornamentation is known to have existed in Armaḥ issues of Aksumite coinage (Munro-Hay 1995: 153, JJ181) and in early Coptic bas-reliefs (Zimbawi 2003: *fig. 37*). They are common in Nubian art as well (Godlewski 1992: *figs. 1–3, 5, 20*).

In all miniatures, the crosses are depicted with handles with square bases. At the lower end of the base, there appears to be some form of ring for attaching the cross's protective cloth, known in Amharic and in Təgrīñña as *gəmgā* or *sābān*. In seven of these miniatures, the cloth is painted red and in three instances it is white, and it appears that these two colours seem to have been traditionally used for wrapping the cross. According to present-day interpretations, the cloth symbolises the shroud of Christ and it also serves for protecting and maintaining the sacred character of the cross. In Təgray, hand crosses are customarily carried in neatly sewn leather cases corresponding to their shape. When not in use, the priests habitually carry their crosses tucked into their waistbands.

Another painted example of a hand cross shows St Anthony of the Desert holding a wooden cross. This is depicted on a separate parchment sewn into a manuscript at Məlləhāyzangi in Təgray. The undated miniature is broadly ascribed to the 15th century (Heldman 1989: 7, *fig. 10*). The cross at the top is proportionally small in comparison to its elongated handle with a rectangular base and a large metal ring through which a colourful cloth is threaded.

Nine important figures of the history of Eastern Churches are depicted in the miniatures of the Gospel book treasured at Säwne Maryam church located 30 km south-east of ʿĪdaga Hamus in Agamä (*fig. 66*). The manuscript is ascribed to the late 15th century. Each figure is shown holding in his left hand a cross either affixed onto a staff or a handle. St John Chrysostom and St Basil hold staffs which are smooth and come to a point at the base. The remaining saints clasp handles which have a rectangular base and a tiny point. A protective cloth is attached to four of the staffs. Although quite stylised, six crosses depicted probably correspond to the hand crosses with handles of varying lengths then in existence. The cross borne by St Athanasius is the one with the shortest handle. The fig-

ures holding the crosses carry censers in their right hands, which indicates that the artist's intention was to depict the incensing ceremony during the liturgy, including the use of crosses.

Another hand cross depiction is in a diptych, D.JJ1, in the Juel-Jensen Collection, Oxford (Juel-Jensen 1992: II, 360, 362, *figs. 359, 361*) which is undated but shows a close stylistic and iconographic affinity with the panel by Färe Şəyon (Chojnacki 1983: 480) dated to the reign of Zär'a Ya'əqob and other mid- or late 15th-century panel paintings (Chojnacki 2000: 136, 166, 350, 387–389). At the bottom of the left panel, two famous Ethiopian saints are represented. One is Täklä Haymanot, ca. 1215–1313, who holds a book and is leaning on a prayer stick. According to the inscription, the second saint is Anoryos and this is presumably a representation of Anoryos the Elder, one of Täklä Haymanot's senior disciples (Taddesse Tamrat 1972: 115, 176, 180–182, 189). With his left hand, he leans upon a prayer stick and in his right hand he is holding a large cross (*fig. 67*). The cross appears to be made of dark wood, probably *Dalbergia melanoxylon*, and is of the short-armed type with a knotted ribbon pattern at the edges (Moore 1971: *figs. 24–29*). The large square base corresponds to the 15th-century cross no. 4329 in the IES Collection (Hecht 1990: 33). A large ring is affixed to the base and a grey cloth is threaded through it.

The wall paintings found in such abundance in Ethiopian churches are another fundamental source of material for the study of hand crosses. A group of cave chapels and churches designated Yäddäbä Maryam, which is situated in the Dawnt region of northern Wällo, offers a wealth of subject matter for further research. According to local tradition a certain *Abunä* Muse was the founder. The wall paintings in Yäddäbä Maryam are not dated and a certain *Abunä* Bə'əse Sälam and *Abba* Habtä Maryam as well as other ecclesiastics mentioned in inscriptions have yet to be identified. However, the early 16th-century Adal invasion which started in 1529 sets the outer limits in terms of dating these wall paintings. Also the three main themes – the first being the Ancient of Days, the second, the Trinity, and the third, the crowned Virgin Mary – all clearly point to the developments in painting during the mid and second half of the 15th century.

The second source of information on the study of hand crosses is a large painted folding parchment strip affixed onto the northern plinth of the sanctuary of the church in 3ṣṭifanos Monastery founded by the monk Iyäsus Mo'a in the 13th century on the shores of the Lake Ḥayq in Wällo. The strip most likely originates from the scriptorium of this monastery, which was very active from the late 13th century until the Adal invasion (Taddesse Tamrat 1970: 116). The iconography and style of the figures represented in the strip are similar to those depicted in Yäddäbä Maryam wall paintings, and probably both were executed by artists trained in the scriptorium. Although the painted strip does not contain legends, which casts some doubt on the identification of certain figures, similarly to the Yäddäbä Maryam paintings, the central theme is the Ancient of Days accompanied by the Twenty-four Priests of Heaven, the Archangels, St John the Baptist and various other saints who are also depicted. All this leads to the conclusion that the date of origin of both sets of paintings is either the late 15th or, at the latest, the first two decades of the 16th century. A striking characteristic of both paintings is this wealth of figures carrying crosses in their left hands and thuribles in their right and a great number of staffs topped with crosses. In contrast to the hand crosses in the Ambassäl Psalter, those in the above paintings appear to be made of two different materials and the two parts were attached using the split-joint method (*fig. 68*).

The Ḥayq artists used various colours to depict crosses and staffs. This, in turn, makes it difficult to conclude that the depictions always reflect the material from which the crosses were actually made. In Yäddäbä Maryam, the colours are more realistic and the artist carefully used them to suggest the material used in the actual crosses. It is generally assumed that crosses painted black were usually iron or at times carved from very dark wood (*fig. 69*). However, it is less clear whether the dull pale orange or ochre colours were used for depicting metal or wood, but the flat surface of the crosses suggest the latter. In Yäddäbä Maryam, the Priests of Heaven depicted in three rows display an astonishing variety of hand crosses with significant variations of form. In the first row (*fig. 70*), the cross held by the first figure is reminiscent of the 15th-century short-armed type hand cross of which a similar but

more recent wooden cross is preserved in Däbrä Gänfäl in Tämben (*fig. 5*). The second and third figures hold patée formée crosses. The fourth holds a cross which appears to be of the patée fitted type and resembles hammered iron. Abunä Muse, the founder of the monastery, is depicted holding a cross of this type (*fig. 69*). Displayed in the second row and carried by the third figure (*fig. 71*), another striking variety of hand cross is the simplified quatrefoil frame cross with pronounced finials, and this, too, is probably a copy of existing metal crosses.

Similar crosses are depicted in the Ḥayq painted strip. The figure on the right of the Ancient of Days is holding one, and in addition the painted strip includes all the above described forms (*fig. 72*). In the depiction of the type of hand cross with elongated lower arms, their arms are distinctly extended – a feature which marks the difference from the Latin-type crosses found in Aksumite coinage (Munro-Hay 1995: type 134).

The majority of crosses depicted in the Ḥayq painted strip are of the patée type with their arms only slightly flaring, although the various kinds depicted in the Yäddäbä Maryam paintings are also found in the painted strip, and are generally larger. Finally, the depiction of hand crosses in both paintings marks the transition from cross handles which are only slightly enlarged at their lower ends to those ending with squares usually shaped as a small cross. In the Ḥayq painted strip, most of the handles are without a base and, at times, the length of the handle is relatively short. Compared to the crosses in the Ambassäl Psalter the obvious conclusion seems to be that the evolution of the form with a square base must have been very gradual and perhaps dependent on local preferences as well.

A particular variety of hand cross with an exceptionally long handle appears to be carried by priests while riding horses or mules (*fig. 3*). In the same cave church dedicated to Abunä Yäm'atä, one of the Nine Saints (Sergew Hable-Selassie 1972: 115–118) and situated at the top of Mount Guḥ in the heart of Gärrä 'altä, the wall painting depicts another monk riding a horse, who is also holding a long-armed cross, which is of a different type (*fig. 73*). The cross appears to be made of iron and similar to the cross of Abunä Tomas (*fig. 18*).

Several of these long-handed crosses are still in existence and are mostly fashioned from iron and are characteristically ornamented with a design composed of small holes. When viewed against the light the intricate pattern which appears to be the invention of the local blacksmiths becomes readily apparent (*fig. 181*). Although the 15th century is the suggested date of their origin (Moore 1989: 113, *fig. 179*), a 16th-century date is equally feasible.

One cross of this kind in the possession of Däbrä Bānkol in the Aksum region is believed to have belonged to *Abunä Māḥani-nä Egziʾ*, who founded the monastery in the late 13th or early 14th century. It is different from others of the same class because of the absence of small holes. Instead, there are very fine engravings of rows of heads along the edges (*fig. 182*).

Although the wooden cross located at 3nda Abba Šəḥma probably dates to the 18th century, it shows that the production of crosses with long handles continued, while the material used dictated the volume of the cross as well as its ornamentation (*fig. 183*).

Two iron crosses, one preserved at Tāʾaminä Maryam (*fig. 74*) and the second at Wuqeñ Gäbräʾel, both belong to the class of iron crosses with a perforated design inspired by the strapwork of early processional crosses (Moore 1971: 29–31, *figs. 20–21*). Moreover, they are adorned with brass or copper incrustations. Both crosses were cut from identical patterns, which suggests that they were made in the same workshop.

In the incised image on the 15th-century processional cross at Gännätä Maryam church, St Peter is shown carrying a hand cross in his right hand and supporting it with his left hand. The cross precisely displays the form of crosses in use during this era including all its component parts – a Greek cross at the top, an elongated handle ending with a square base and a ring attached to it (*fig. 85*).

Two miniatures found in the *gädlä* or Acts of Ewošatewos, represent important monastic leaders of the Ethiopian Church during the 13th and 14th century. The manuscript is ascribed to the late 15th century and treasured at Däbrä Šärabi in the vicinity of Mäqälä. In the miniature on fol. 123v, *Abunä Ewošatewos* himself is shown ordaining a young monk, an act which is described as “blessing his son”. Two other figures shown are *Abba Absadi*

and *Abba Filəpos*, each holding a patée formé type hand cross with the flat base (*fig. 75*). In a second miniature on fol. 123r, three other figures, *Abunä Täklä Haymanot*, *Abunä Abib* and *Abba Danəʾel*, carry similar patée formé type hand crosses, which bear a marked similarity to the hand crosses depicted in the Yäddəbä Maryam paintings (*fig. 76*).

Finally, Brancalion, an Italian artist residing in Ethiopia from around 1480 to the third decade of the 16th century (Chojnacki 1983: 378–381), depicted *Abunä Täklä Haymanot* and *Abunä Ewošatewos* and St Kiro, a Near Eastern saint, all holding crosses in their hands. Brancalion composed their faces as he imaged them to be, but depicted their monastic attire and the crosses in their hands as he saw them *in situ*. The simple slender crosses appear to be made of brass, and the lower vertical arm is elongated and probably with a base which may be inferred from the depiction of the cross of *Abunä Ewošatewos* (*fig. 78*). Although the depiction of these crosses is naturalistic while those in the Ḥayq strip are stylised, they essentially share the same characteristics. Also, there is a close analogy with the cross reputed to have belonged to *Abunä Mädhani-nä Egziʾ* at Däbrä Bānkol (*fig. 177*), which demonstrates the longevity of the tradition.

The above summary substantiates the extensive use of hand crosses during this period and the variety of their forms, with the traditional Aksumite patée type cross clearly being the most favoured. This is also corroborated by the actual hand crosses still in existence. The forms of the majority of these crosses are imitations of processional crosses with adaptations necessitated by size and the materials used.

One example is the cross in Däbrä Maryam zä-Ḥayda in Šire (*fig. 18*). The cross is believed to have been used by its founder, *Abunä Tomas*, a little-known 14th-century local saint. The cross in question is a long-handed bronze hand cross ending with a small cube at the bottom and having five sets of double rings similar to those on the staffs in Ora Mäsqäl Čärqos. The cross at the top is of the patée type with short side arms and is clearly of the fifth form (Ie) of the Aksumite crosses classification. It also bears a similarity to the crosses set within the arched frame of two processional crosses at Ora Mäsqäl. These combined characteristics strongly

suggest that the *Abunä Tomas* cross is one of the oldest in existence in present-day Ethiopia.

A second example is a copper hand cross preserved at *Däbrä Gärimä* near *Adwa* which is of a simple patée design with the ends of the arms slightly rounded and the elongated handle has a ring at the bottom (fig. 79). According to local tradition, this cross is as old as the foundation of the monastery in the 6th century. However, the veracity of this claim is debatable. Although its form can be found on Aksumite coinage, it is also known to have been used in 15th-century processional crosses (Moore 1971: 33, fig. 23).

A third example is a silver cross which has been lightly gilded. There are incised figures on it which are a clear indication that the cross dates to the mid- or late 15th century. On one face (fig. 80a), the image of the Virgin Mary nursing the Christ Child and wearing a crown is strongly influenced by Western European painting and is also common in 15th-century icons (Chojnacki 1983: 334–335, figs. 155–156). On the second face (fig. 80b), there is an image of “Our Lord”, but a meaning of the remaining part of the caption is not clear. The workmanship demonstrated on both faces of the cross is of exceptional quality and bears witness to the highly developed art of engraving during that century. As early as 1520, the records of the intrepid Alvares mention having seen incised crosses during an audience given by *Ləbnä Dengel*. A page on the king’s right carried a silver cross in his hand, with “figures carved in it with a burin. From where we stood it was not possible to make out the figures on the cross, but I saw it later, and saw the figures” (Alvares 1961: 304).

An especially large 15th-century hand cross, cat. no. 4329 in the IES Collection, Addis Abāba, which is carved of dark wood with superb engravings supports Father Alvares’ observations. Marilyn Heldman’s attribution of the cross to the painter *Färe Şeyon* is, however, highly speculative (Heldman 1994: 49–50).

Processional (Blessing) Crosses

It can be inferred from Alvares’s narrative that each church and monastery possessed several processional crosses. He was present in *Mäkanä Şəllase* Church during *Ləbnä Dengel*’s visit there in January 1520, and was clearly impressed by what he witnessed.

“The people could not be counted, the crosses were innumerable,” he writes, “clergy and monks . . . divided into bands, as they were from many monasteries and churches, and they accompanied their crosses”. He explains that the monks came great distances because in the kingdom of Amhara there were no monasteries, but only great churches with the tombs of kings (Alvares 1961: 338). The reference to “their crosses” can only mean processional crosses which are the property of churches and monasteries, not of individuals. The large number of crosses was explained to Alvares by *Ləbnä Dəngəl* as being a result of the numerous gifts of crosses, umbrellas and church crowns which his ancestors had donated to the churches (Alvares 1961: 352).

Alvares recorded that the processional crosses were principally used for divine liturgy and they accompany the eucharistic bread when it is carried to the church from the place where it is baked, called *betä ləhem* (lit. Bethlehem) (Alvares 1961: 84). Processional crosses were the essential component of church processions, like those “around the churchyard with four or five crosses on staffs” (Alvares 1961: 78–79) and other religious occasions such as the liturgy of Palm Sunday (Alvares 1961: 395–396).

Alvares also saw a processional cross being used during a funeral ceremony (Alvares 1961: 111). He also describes the special procedure followed when the *abunä* travelled to other locations. At his side “the attendants carry three crosses on staffs raised higher than him [the *abunä*]”. Alvares expressed surprise that the crosses did not precede the *abunä* rather than being carried at his side, but the *abunä* replied that the “the cross which he carried in his hand was ample, and that no others should go before it” (Alvares 1961: 359).

Throughout the entire period in question, there are virtually no representations of processional crosses in paintings, except for four full-folio depictions of crosses in one of the manuscripts, probably including among other texts the *Lahä Maryam*, or Lament of Mary, and currently in the possession of a modern church, *Bərbər Maryam*, in the *Şzo* locality north of the town of *Çenča* in Gamo in Southern Ethiopia. Prior to this, throughout four centuries of isolation from the Christian Empire, the manuscript has been kept in a cave to ensure its safety from marauders and

non-Christian people occupying the area. Although traditionally ascribed to the reign of Ləbnä Dəngəl, the date of origin of the manuscript might go back to the mid or late 15th century.

The Copts ornamented the incipit folios of their Gospel manuscripts with coloured drawings of crosses. They always followed the same pattern which included the large stepped base of the cross and equally stepped extremities forming three triangles (Leroy 1974: 59–60). Although the artist ornamenting the Bərbər Maryam manuscripts might have been inspired by Coptic examples, using an existing cross as a model seems to have been his own inspiration.

In the Bərbər Maryam manuscript, two folios are stained by exposure to dampness, but two others still show the original brilliance of the design and colour (*figs. 81 a–b*). The depictions of the crosses are exceptional because the artist was obviously inspired by crosses which he had actually seen. Although he filled their interior with a pattern of his own invention, he still succeeded in reproducing the basic 15th-century characteristics of processional crosses and the richness of their exuberant ornamentation.

A great many crosses produced during the period are, in fact, still in existence. Some bear inscriptions which include the name of an Ethiopian ruler, thereby firmly establishing their 15th-century date of origin. Among these is the cross IES Mus. 7118 in the collection of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Abāba, which has a diamond-shaped framework with rows of tiny crosses all along the edges (*fig. 184*). The exceptional quality of the cross consists of the strapwork pattern executed with great artistry. In the centre of the cross, there is a short-armed cross which includes inscriptions on both its faces. One reads that the cross was made during the reign of Zār'a Ya'əqob and its maker is Gäbrä Krəstos. The cross therefore originates from the 1434–1468 period. On the other face it is proclaimed that the cross was a gift from Abunä 3stifanos to a certain church dedicated to the Virgin Mary, so that it might be his guide to Heaven with his children, i.e. younger monks. The inscription also includes a warning: "Do not sell. Do not take".

The basic concept of this particular type of cross is that the design is created by the contrast between the solid metal, shaped

of component parts according to a certain pattern and its background consisting of empty space. The design is set within a framework whose outline gives a diamond form to the cross.

Another type of processional cross was created according to a different concept in terms of design. The cross is conceived to be a flat surface for the engravings which are either purely ornamental or represent holy figures, thus combining the characteristics of the sign of Christianity with those of an icon. There is also a difference in the techniques used for their production.

In the first type, the cross and the shaft are cast in one piece, while in the second, the shaft and the lower arms are made separately and then joined to the cross. These crosses are usually thinner and smaller. Being constructed from one piece of metal, the first type are more solid and durable, whereas those made from separate pieces tend to break and as a result many of them have undergone repairs.

This occurred in the case of a brass(?) cross at the Tā'aminä Maryam church in Tämben which was broken and crudely repaired. The body of the cross consists of a short-armed patée cross with large finials, each having looped crosses at the extremities. Small crosses are set between the arms, and in this way the design includes the traditional seven crosses which apparently symbolise the seven mysteries of the Church. There are images engraved on both faces of the cross. On one face the image of Mary with her son and the Archangels Michael and Gabriel have been engraved, and on the second face, the image of the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor is shown with the Patriarch Moses and Prophet Elias flanking him. In addition, the inscription reads that the cross belonged to Zār'a Ya'əqob named Constantine, which firmly dates the cross to the middle of the 15th century (*fig. 82*).

A further development in the evolution of processional crosses are the short-armed patée crosses entirely surrounded by finials formed of an elaborately curving and intertwining pattern of ribbons giving the impression of being knotted or woven. They are surmounted by small patée crosses (Moore 1971: 34) and the cross assumes the form of a diamond. In spite of the missing crosslets between the arms, there is an analogy between these crosses and the Tā'amina cross mentioned above which definitely places their

dating in the mid- to late 15th century, and they can be considered as the most characteristic production of that century.

Many crosses of this kind are currently in public and private collections outside Ethiopia. The IES Museum in Addis Abāba is in possession of seven of them, one of which is silver embossed with gold (Moore 1971: 35–44, figs. 24–30). Among the few still treasured in Ethiopian churches, the cross kept in the Qoqolo Yoḥannēs Church in ʒndārtā, Təgray, is significant due to its exceptional engravings. On one face, the Virgin Mary is shown carrying the Child on her right arm and holding a large Cross of the Passion. The idea of the Child's predestination was expressed in Byzantine and Cretan iconography by the image known as the Virgin of the Passion, but the Ethiopian artist has expressed it differently and in his own unique fashion (*fig. 83*). Furthermore, the form of the cross which is similar to those found in the Ḥayq painted strip provides tangible evidence that the transition from crosses whose handles had no base to full-fledged hand crosses was not yet complete. On the other face are the figures of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Patriarchs of the Old Testament, whose hand gestures are typical of 15th-century Ethiopian art.

Another cross which is made from silver and located at Dima Giyorgis church in Goḡḡam falls into the same category and its engravings are distinguished by their perfection as well as their subject matter. On the obverse face is an engraved image of the Crucifixion (*fig. 84*) and on the reverse are the Apostles Peter and Paul. Both images were executed in the late 15th-century style, thereby confirming the date of origin to that specific time.

The third processional cross whose date of origin has been firmly established is kept in one of the churches of Dāq Island on Lake Ṭanā, but many centuries earlier the cross was donated by Zār'a Ya'eqob for "the eternal life of his soul" to Nāgwädgwäd (Du Bourguet 1964: 257), a monastery which has long-since ceased to exist. The equal-armed patée cross is set in a circle and diamond-shaped framework consisting of rows of small circles each ornamented with a piece of glass. In high relief, Christ is shown holding a book on one face and the Crucifixion is depicted on the other (Petrides 1969: 71). This sumptuous cross is a vivid expression of Zār'a Ya'eqob's religious fervour as well as his generosity, while

the image of the Crucifixion links it to a bronze processional cross no. 3970 in the IES Museum in Addis Abāba. In this case, the cross is hollowed on one side and the figures in high relief are missing. They may possibly have represented the Crucifixion. On the back, within a decorative almond-shaped mandorla, the incised figure of Christ holding a book is surrounded by the Twelve Apostles (*fig. 185*).

In its basic form, the processional copper(?) cross at Gännätä Maryam church in Lasta (*fig. 85*) is similar to the preceding cross, aside from some secondary details. The supporting arm of the original cross was broken and partially repaired and replaced at a later date. Although the cross is of crude workmanship in comparison to the fine work of the royal crosses, its appeal lies in the fact that it is the product of a country artisan. One engraving represents the Archangel Michael probably holding an orb and a second depicts the Apostles Peter and Paul accompanied by the figure of an unnamed archangel with a nimbus who is holding an orb. Peter, who is in the middle, holds a large benediction cross. The style of the engraving as well as the delineation of the faces point to the middle or late 15th century as a possible date of origin for this cross.

The fourth processional cross belonging to this period is situated in the Bargello National Museum in Florence. It was inventoried there in 1771, but almost certainly was brought to Europe long before. According to the inscription on the cross, it was donated by *nəguś* or King Bā'ädä Maryam, 1468–1478, to the then broadly defined Amhara people. The large flat brass body of the cross is of the patée type with cross-formed finials, filled with various engraved figures. They represent the Virgin Mary and Child with the Archangels on one face and the Crucifixion on the other (Tedeschi 1991: 163–173, tabs. I, II). In some respects, certain details relate this processional cross to the Tā'aminä cross, however its noble simplicity places it in a class of its own.

All crosses described thus far are only a selected representative part of the extremely varied production of processional crosses during the period under discussion. There are, for example, crosses with a circular framework. The earliest cross of this kind is ascribed to the 14th century and it is comprised of a Greek cross

surrounded with a circular rim ornamented with a zig-zag pattern (Mercier 2001: 72), however most crosses in this class are different. Their main feature is a framework consisting of several concentric circles and a relatively small Greek or equal-armed patée cross within the quadrangle looped at four points, all set in the middle. The cross is ornamented with miniature crosses running along its outer ring. The crosses are cast in one piece with the base and body formed of the same material. The high degree of perforation, created by a radiating latticework of crosses, would have been difficult to achieve with any technique other than the lost wax method. Bronze was principally used as the material of choice, although occasionally copper was also utilised. The crosses are tentatively ascribed to the 14th–15th century (Moore 1971: 25–28, figs. 15–17) and this attribution is generally accepted (Mann 2001: 80–81; Girma Fisseha 2002: 89). Today, crosses of this kind are infrequently found in churches and monasteries. However, there is still one located at Guduba Yoḥannəs Church of Haggärä Sälam in Tämben (*fig. 86*).

Crosses with a quatrefoil framework fall into a separate classification. Some are relatively simple with one large patée cross within a frame such as the one found in a cave church dedicated to Täklä Haymanot on ʿZnda Guya close to Abiy Addi in Tämben (*fig. 87*).

In Bähəra Maryam Haramat, however, the inner pattern evolved into four crosses with curling projections at their extremities. Still more elaborate inner patterns can also be found, such as the one in St Mary's church in the locality of Dəngəlat situated in the vicinity of Haggärä Sälam in Tämben (*fig. 88*). Its date of origin is ascertained by the dedicatory inscription which embodies all the characteristics of 15th-century script.

In the IES collection (Mus. 4652), there is a rare type of cross which is characterised by its framework in the form of a Greek cross filled with a strapwork pattern. The cross in question is firmly dated to the second half of the 15th century (Moore 1971: 31, *fig. 21*). This particular form found considerable favour among silver-smiths from the late 19th century onwards.

Two processional crosses in the Church of Abba Šəḥma situated in the region of ʿZdaga Arabi near Aksum reveal the continuing production of crosses without a framework. In one cross, there

are no supporting lower arms and the ends of the arms have the shape of a fleur-de-lis. This and the ornamental designs incised on both faces clearly indicate its 15th-century origin (*fig. 89* compare with *fig. 48*). The second cross reveals the continuing tradition of the early bronze crosses with arms that are distinctly curved at the tips (*fig. 90*). Each tip, however, evolved into curved tongue-like extremities, the cross thus gaining the impression of dramatic inner movement.

Another class includes large diamond-shaped crosses which are either made of copper or bronze and they are ascribed to the 14th or 15th century with more precise dates in some instances. The copper(?) cross housed at the Wuqēñ Gäbrə'el monastery in Tämben is outstanding for its purity of line and the artistry demonstrated in the execution of the chequered pattern filling the framework adorned with rows of minute crosses (*fig. 91*). According to local tradition, as well as the recorded life story of Abba Danə'el, the royally respected founder of the monastery came from Šäwa province in the late 14th century and died during Zär'a Ya'əqob's reign (Kinfe-Rigb Zelleke 1975: 68) – a fact which confirms the origin of the cross as belonging to this period.

The specific case of the age of crosses established by circumstantial evidence occurred in connection with certain processional crosses found in the foothills of the highlands of Gamo in Southern Ethiopia. The area was already Christianised at the beginning of the 16th century and Bərbər Maryam church appears to be one of the most important centres of local Christianity. According to local tradition the church was destroyed by one of Aḥmad Grañ's commanders in approximately 1532 (Bustorf 2003: 531). Since the Adal war and the subsequent invasion of the Oromo people in the middle of the 16th century, the entire southern part of the Ethiopian Empire became completely isolated from the Christian North for close to four centuries. After Menilek II reconquered the region in 1897, the books and other paraphernalia including crosses were found at Bərbər Maryam. They were described by the French researchers Azais and Chambard who travelled in Gamo during the early 1920s (Azais 1931: 266–269). In 1976, another French scholar, Jacques Bureau, published an article about the objects found in four churches identified as existing before the inva-

sion of Aḥmad Grañ (Bureau 1976: 297–301). Among them two crosses were still to be found there and Bureau reproduced photographs of them, while one copper processional cross photographically reproduced by Azais and Chambard seems to be already lost. For dating all these sacred paraphernalia and crosses Aḥmad Grañ's warrior invasion is, in fact, a proof that they pre-date this event.

An iron processional cross found in Bərbər Maryam Church (Bureau 1976: 297, pl. XLVI) is a barbed patée cross with short side arms and circular finials. Except for the ornamentation of the lower arm, the cross is very similar to no. 3998 in the collection of the IES Museum, Addis Abāba, which is ascribed by Eine Moore to the 15th century (Moore 1971: 45, fig. 32). This coincides with the dating of the Bərbər Maryam cross. The cross was apparently hammered and could well have been the work of the local blacksmith. The tradition of smelting iron in the Gamo area dates back thousands of years (Jensen 1959: 249–254).

A second bronze cross also discovered in 1976 by Bureau probably belonged to Dorze Giyorgis church, but was kept at the home of the *balabbat* or chief of Dorze and used only for exceptional occasions (Bureau 1976: 298, pl. XLVI). The cross features a quatrefoil framework and intricate ribbon-pattern of multiple interlocking circles and crosses and it must have been cast either in Central or more probably Northern Ethiopia. Similar crosses are known to exist and written descriptions have been recorded.

Two crosses bearing the closest resemblance to the above-mentioned cross are now found in public collections. One cross dated to the 15th century is at the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore (Mann 2001: 82–83, fig. 28), and the second dated to the 14th–15th century is in the IES Museum, Addis Abāba (Moore 1971: 23–24, fig. 13). A third cross ascribed to the 13th–14th century is found in Bilbila Čärqos church in Lasta (*fig. 186*). These dates are corroborated by the Gamo crosses as recorded by Bureau.

A cross treasured at Däbrä Bäsrat founded by Zena Marqos, a relative and disciple of Täklä Haymanot, in the Morät district in Šäwa, belongs to the same category (*fig. 93*). Until the mid-16th century, the monastery was an important centre of monasticism and situated close to the royal camp. Then it was cut off and isolated

from the rest of Ethiopia for three centuries by the Oromo invasion. The impoverished monastery, however, preserved this splendid bronze cross with silver incrustation and engraved figures. A similar cross, much simpler but with the same ornamentation of squares and engraved figures, was preserved in nearby Däy Giyorgis Church (Chojnacki 1969: 46–52). Thus the date of origin for both crosses perhaps goes back to the middle of the 15th century.

Finally, in its basic form the cross found at Wafa Iyäsus church in Gʷänča Valley in Eastern Goğğam, is a patée cross with the tips of its arms touching each other while each of its three finials is separately elaborated. This cross foreshadows the formation of 17th-century processional crosses. The engravings, on the other hand, show a distinctly mid-15th-century style – Christ accompanied by the Archangels, Michael and Gabriel on one face (*fig. 92a*) and the four Evangelists on the other (*fig. 92b*) – suggest the late 15th century as the date of origin of the cross.

Staffs Surmounted by Crosses

For hundreds of years, the heads of Ethiopia's monasteries were believed to have owned traditional staffs topped with a cross. This is revealed by the narrative in the Acts of 15th-century Märḥä Krəstos, Abbot of Däbrä Libanos. According to the text, he and his assistant went to the Mugär country to preach and find new converts. With them, they took the image of the Virgin Mary, the "holy book" (the Gospels) and a "cross" (Kur 1972: 48). It was probably a staff surmounted by a cross and Märḥä Krəstos carried it because of his high office. In the same text, it is reported somewhat boastfully that Patriarch of Alexandria, Yoḥannəs, on hearing about Märḥä Krəstos, wrote a letter asking that he send him his cross and staff because he wished "to kiss the cross of an orthodox [believer]". This, he added, would be the same as if they were to meet in person and face to face prior to their final meeting in Heaven (Kur 1972: 80).

In another passage of the same text, the idea is expressed with even greater clarity. It seems that Märḥä Krəstos was indisposed and unable to go to Angot to take part in the exhumation of the body of *Abba* Filəpos, third Abbot of Däbrä Libanos (formerly designated Däbrä Aşbo), who had died there. In his stead,

Mārḥä Krəstos sent a priest “who carried his cross” (Kur 1972: 63, 83). In this way, he considered that he was symbolically represented by the presence of his own cross. In 1497, on the return journey to Däbrä Libanos following a visit to the court of Naʿod, Mārḥä Krəstos fell gravely ill. His assistant therefore carried his staff for him. When they arrived in Däbrä Libanos, Mārḥä Krəstos had a premonition that he was on the brink of death, so he called “for his son who carried his staff” (Kur 1972: 95). It was evidently the custom for one of the young monks, who were known by the general term “sons” of the head of the monastery, to carry his staff. In Ethiopia, this was considered fitting as well as practical, due to the fact that the long iron staff of the head of a monastery was rather heavy. Also in Alvares’s narrative, the same idea is clearly expressed. The Portuguese priest received as a farewell gift from Ləbnä Dəngəl a “cross of silver and an inlaid pastoral staff . . . as the title and token of possession of the lordship [of the Red Sea islands]” (Alvares 1961: 377–378).

The above written records are corroborated by a 15th- or 16th-century drawing on fol. 15r of the 14th-century book of the Gospels at Däbrä Šārabi, a monastery reputedly established by Abunä Ewošatewos, ca. 1273–1352. The drawing clearly shows a walking figure holding a staff of bamboo cane with a point at the bottom and topped with a Greek cross. An “x” ornamentation appears on the intersection of the arms. The accompanying caption reads: “This is Tomas [probably the Apostle Thomas] ready to go and preach as assigned to him by the Lord, Jesus Christ” (fig. 96).

The existence of a large quantity of such staffs preserved in the monasteries and country churches of Təgray suggest that perhaps they were not exclusively made for the heads of the monasteries, but also used by the heads of more important churches. They are slender and forged from iron probably by a local ironmonger. An example is found in Konalä Däbräḥayl (figs. 187 a–b).

In the Ambassäl Psalter, there are two depictions of staffs topped with a cross which seem to represent their oldest, possibly dating from the late Aksumite period. In one miniature on fol. 64r, there are St James and St John, Son of Thunder, and between them is a staff topped with an equal-armed cross (fig. 97). Although the drawing is very abstract, the cross is clearly reminiscent of the one

in Ora Mäsqäl (fig. 189) as well as the staff attributed to Abunä Arägawi displayed at the Gondär Exhibition (Magnis 1955: 20). The second staff depicted in the Psalter on fol. 137v belonged to St Anthony of the Desert, “the first monk”, according to the accompanying inscription and drawn with considerable attention to detail (fig. 60). At the top, the arms of the patée cross are ornamented with small balls at their extremities and two incisions in the staff at the bottom mark the sharpened point. The cross displays an obvious affinity to the crosses on staffs found in Ora Mäsqäl church as well as with Nubian crosses (Ratyński 1982: 238) and Coptic crosses (Zimbawo 2003: figs. 236–237).

During the 15th century and especially the second half of it, another type of staff with a cross emerged. These mainly appear in the manuscripts originating from Agamä, and are painted in a particular style which evolved in the Gundä Gunde scriptorium. This style then spread to the scriptoria of the region. The crosses are characterised by nodes on the staffs, possibly indicating bamboo canes, and by the intricate ornamentation of the looped ends of the arms of the cross (Heldman 1989: 7, figs. 9, 19). In a 15th-century Psalter belonging to Ora Mäsqäl Čärqos, there are two depictions of saints with staffs. On fol. 25v St Țimotewos (Timothy) is holding a cross with looped arms (fig. 98). On a folio which has clearly been added to the same manuscript, a certain St Ḥaräyo (Hilary) is depicted with a staff topped with a simple Greek cross, but the staff is marked with knots designed as red squares (fig. 99).

Part V: Late 16th- and 17th-Century Crosses

As a result of Aḥmad b. Ibrahim al-Gazi, known also as Aḥmad Grañ’s disastrous aggression and the subsequent Oromo invasion, merely half of the 15th-century Christian Empire remained, with its rulers controlling only the central and northern provinces. In the late 16th century, the access to the Red Sea was lost when the Ottomans occupied Məşawwa and began encroaching on the highlands. Ethiopia’s rulers then moved their residences to the region north of Lake Ṭana.

The activities of three rulers mark the period. Šārša Dəngəl, 1563–1597, was constantly trying to arrest the Oromo advance and regain influence in the lost southern territories of the Empire

as well as check the Ottoman encroachments into the northern highlands. Susnəyos, 1607–1632, was militarily successful, but his internal policies created great difficulties. The third ruler, Fasilädäs, 1632–1667, successfully stabilised conditions, re-establishing the old faith and the traditional dependency on the Coptic patriarchate in Alexandria. In 1636, he established the city of Gondär, which became the political capital of the Empire for over a century and was the hub of cultural activity until the late 19th century. Fasilädäs's son, Yoḥannəs I, 1667–1682, was a pious ruler, who, together with his wife Säblä Wängel, donated processional crosses to various churches. These crosses are still in existence.

The workshops of Gondär dictated the style for the whole country, and this was also true for the production of crosses. The silversmiths who worked for the rulers and nobility maintained and perfected their techniques. The great diversity of cross forms characterising the creativity during the previous centuries was replaced by artistic expressions known as the Gondär style which evolved into two main variants, both of which were derived from the patée cross.

In the first variant, extensively used during the late 16th and 17th century, the tips of the arms are extended and tapered, as is shown in the depiction of the cross on the back of triptych no. 3672 in the IES Museum (*fig. 100*), as well as on the carved cover panel of the pendant diptych no. 6795 in the same museum (*fig. 188*). In both variants, the finials are trifoliate with a pointed centre lobe similar to the fleury cross. Eine Moore designated this as the Gondarine Open Cross (Moore 1971: 49), but it may be called a patée cross. The second variant is the *qärnä bäg'ə* or the Horn of a Ram – also referred to as the “Horn of the Lamb of God”. The extended tips of the arms are curled in the manner of ram's horns. An example of this is the cross depicted at the back of diptych no. 3892 in the IES Museum in Addis Abäba showing the slender arms of a cross which appears to be wrought of iron (*fig. 101*). Within these two forms there exist several variations of detail. However, the above basic form with its two expressions became a model for cross production during the following centuries.

In the 16th century, there were also crosses in ancient forms which were either produced at the time or were still in use. Tradi-

163. *Nəguś Sahlä Šəllase* of Šäwa Watching Warrior Games, illustration in W.C. Harris, *The Highlands of Ethiopia*, 1844, p. 216

164. Processional cross, believed to have belonged to *Abunä Fəre Kahn(?)*, 17th century brass, 19 x 18.5 cm Däbrä Maryam zä-Hayda, Šire

165. Crucifixes of Italian origin, 1936–1941 Däbrä Šärabī, 3ndārta



166. Hataz, ca. 570
Aksum coin, reverse,
copper, type 140 (JJ84)

168. Joel, ca. 550
Aksum coin, reverse,
copper, type 131 (JJ57)

170. Joel, ca. 550
Aksum coin, reverse,
copper, type 132 (JJ330)



167. Anonymous ca. 400
Aksum coin, reverse,
copper, type 52 (JJ364)

169. Joel, ca. 550
Aksum coin, reverse,
copper, type 134 (JJ108)



171. Armaḥ, after 630
Aksum coin, reverse, copper
gilt, type 153 (JJ106)

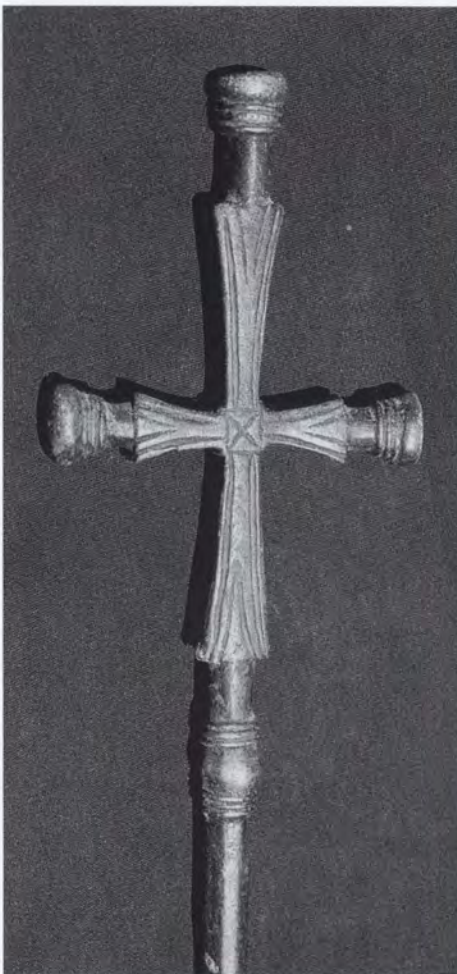
172. ZA-YA'ABIYO LA
MADHEN NEGUS/"AGD",
ca. 525
Aksum coin, reverse, silver,
type 126i (JJ240)



173. Staff topped with cross,
ca. 8th–12th century
iron(?), h. 169 cm,
cross 17 x 8 cm
Ora Mäsqäl Čärqos, Agamä



174. Staff topped with cross,
ca. 8th–12th century
iron(?), h. 158 cm,
cross 13 x 8.5 cm
Ora Mäsqäl Čärqos, Agamä



175. St Cyriacus,
1270–1285
wall painting
Gännätä Maryam, Lasta



176. St Mamas, 1270–1285
wall painting
Gännätä Maryam, Lasta



177. Hand cross, 11th–13th
century
bronze, 51.5 x 5.2 cm
(one arm broken)
Dābrā Bānkol, Aksum
Region



178. Processional cross, 12th–13th century
bronze, 25 x 15 cm
Lalibāla, Betā Giyorgis,
Lasta



179. Staff topped by a cross, 14th–15th century(?)
iron, h. 157 cm,
cross 14.5 x 7.4 cm
Yohannēs Kāma Church,
3ndārta



180. Processional cross, 12th–13th century
bronze
Lalibāla, Betā Maryam,
Lasta



181. Hand cross with long handle, 16th century
29 x 12 cm
Guya Täklä Haymanot, Tāmēn



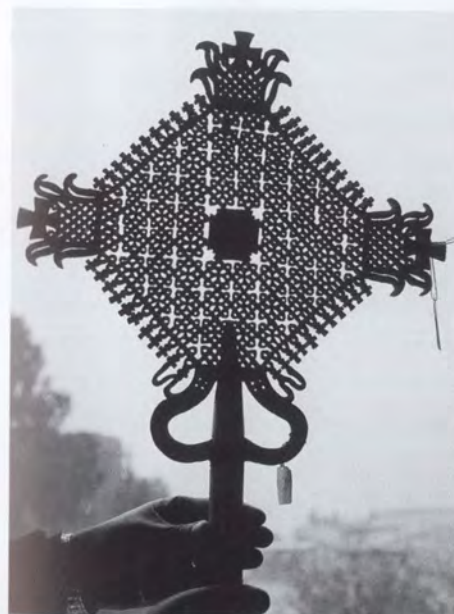
182. Hand cross with long handle, 16th century
iron, 34 x 10 cm
Dābrā Bānkol, Aksum Region



183. Hand cross with long handle, 17th–18th century
wood, 59.5 x 11.4 cm
3nda Abba Šəḥma, Šdaga Arabi



184. Processional cross, 1434–1468
bronze, 48.2 x 35.1 cm
IES Mus. 7118, Addis Abāba



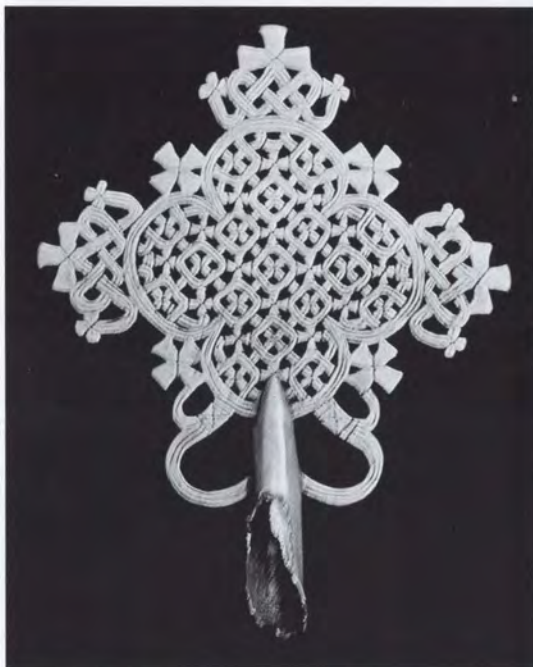
185. Processional cross with the engraved image of Christ and the Twelve Apostles, early to mid-15th century
gilded bronze, 33 x 26.9 cm
IES Mus. 3970, Addis Abāba



186. Processional cross,
13th–14th century
bronze, 41 x 35 cm
Bilbila Ćärqos, Lasta

187a. Staff topped with
cross, 14th–15th century
iron, 170 cm
Konalä Däbrähayl, Tämben

187b. Staff topped with cross
iron, 25 x 13.4 cm
Konalä Däbrähayl, Tämben



188. Two patée hand crosses
carved on the front of
pendant diptych,
early 17th century
IES Mus. 6795, Addis
Abäba

189. Staff topped with cross,
8th–12th century
Ora Mäsqaġ Ćärqos, Agamä

190. Hand cross,
17th–19th century
19.5 x 7.2 cm
Private Collection



191. Liturgy cross, 18th–19th
century
brass, 47.2 x 15.4 cm
Däbrä Maryam zä-Häyda,
Šire



192. Liturgy cross, 18th–19th
century
iron(?), 43 x 15.3 cm
Guya Täklä Haymanot,
Tämben



193. Liturgy cross, 18th
century(?)
wood, 38 x 9.5 cm
Konalä Däbrähayl, Tämben



194. Hand cross for
liturgical dance (detail),
18th–19th century
wood, 33 x 12.3 cm
Kiyazba K^aqa Arba'otu
Žnsäsa, Tämben



195. Processional cross,
ca. 1779–1800
brass thinly gilded,
59.8 x 29.5 cm
Gənfal, Tämben



196. Engraved images of the Virgin Mary, St George and Cherubs, Processional cross, 1790s silver gilded, 60.5 x 42.5 cm Däbrä Gənfał Šəllase, Tämben



197. Clerk at Däbrä Bərhan carpet shop wearing copper neck cross, March 2004, Šäwa



198. Three liturgy crosses, late 19th–early 20th century silver, 42.5 x 16.5; 35 x 15.5; 30 x 12.5 cm Ruba K^oisa Giyorgis, Tämben

199. Liturgy cross, late 19th century gilded silver, 33 x 13.5 cm Adwa Mädhane ‘Aläm

200. Liturgy cross, 19th century wood, 38 x 14 cm Däbrä Bankol, Aksum Region

201. Liturgy cross, early 20th century gilded silver, 31 x 13 cm Adwa 3nda Šəllase



202. Liturgy cross,
19th–early 20th century
wood, 44 x 14 cm
Däbrä Maryam zä-Hayda,
Šire

203. Images of the Trinity,
the Virgin Mary and St
George engraved on a
processional cross, ca. 1885
silver gilded, 61.5 x 42 cm
Ganfäl Šallase, Täm̄ben

204. Processional cross, late
19th century
silver, 47.5 x 32.5 cm
Ruba Wäyñi, Täm̄ben



tionally, Gondarine hand crosses became imitations of processional crosses. A larger quantity of wooden crosses appear to have survived from the 17th and 18th century than those from the previous centuries. Together they comprise a unique corpus which bears witness to the extraordinary creativity and sense of aesthetics of the individuals who created them.

Neck Crosses

The earliest known depiction of neck crosses in Ethiopian painting is found in the wall paintings of *Abba Yoḥanni*, or *Däbrä Asa*, a cave church in Täm̄ben, which was cut from the rock in the late 14th century. The paintings themselves are undated, but they embody the characteristics of late 16th- or early 17th-century works. *Abba Abäyod*(?), a saint not officially listed among the Ethiopian saints, is depicted praying with raised hands. He wears the traditional monk's garb and a large cross suspended on a chain which appears to be made of iron as is the cross itself. In this instance, it is a true pectoral cross of the patée type, certainly drawn from observation with the tips of its extended finials curving down as the horns of a ram and its centre lobe is pointed. There are barbs at the point where the arms cross (*fig. 102*). The cross is similar to the one reproduced by Mercier in his Paris exhibition catalogue (Mercier 2001: 78). Among the few older neck crosses in existence, one similar cross in the IES Mus. 5808, which is quite crudely cut from copper, appears to originate from the 17th or 18th century (*fig. 103*).

Hand Crosses

Hand crosses which belonged to the founders of monasteries were particularly venerated after their death and used by their successors on special occasions. When *Abba Yoḥannēs*, the mid-16th-century Abbot of *Däbrä Libanos*, travelled to the court of *Aṣe Gälawdewos*, 1540–1559, he took with him the cross of *Abunä Täklä Haymanot*, the founder of the monastery. The ruler made him sit on his right and Yoḥannes blessed him with the revered cross (Ricci 1971: 183).

The Jesuit missionary, Manoel Barradas, noted that “the head monks carry in their hands as a badge of office their largest cross-

es of silver, iron, copper or black wood. Typically, they are of very inventive design. Some, for example, are composed of many interwoven crosses which together form a single cross" (Barradas 1996: 140). The French traveller Charles Poncet journeyed from Cairo to Gondär from June 1698 to July 1699, passing through the Sudan. However, his companion, the Jesuit François-Xavier de Brévédent, died on 9 July just as they were a short distance from Gondär. On hearing about this, Ethiopian priests arrived to assist in the funeral ceremony. They were clad, Poncet recorded, in their ceremonial vestments, each carrying an iron cross (Foster 1949: 115). Poncet lived in Gondär for nine months and had occasion to meet the *Abunä* Marqos, Head of the Ethiopian Church, who carried an enamelled cross, which he had probably brought from Egypt. Poncet also had the opportunity to watch the *abunä* perform the ceremony for the ordination of deacons. The *abunä* blessed the candidates with a surprisingly heavy iron cross which he held in his hands. Poncet estimated the weight of the cross to be between seven and eight pounds (Foster 1949: 122–123).

The custom of carrying hand crosses by priests and monks appears to have had a marked influence on depictions of saints by 16th- and 17th-century artists. Before that time, saints were represented holding the Holy Book, and as late as the 15th century, the cross appeared in the hands of holy men and only very occasionally, whereas in the 16th century, a cross generally replaced the traditional book. In the mid-16th-century triptych no. 3992 in the IES Museum in Addis Abäba, *Abunä* Gäbrä Mämfäs Qəddus is shown holding a large Greek cross made of iron, but its lower arm expands at the bottom (fig. 104). Similarly, in the late 16th-century triptych no. 4001 in the IES Museum, *Abunä* Ewostatewos holds an iron cross whose flat-ended arms are slightly flared at the extremities (fig. 105). Also, in the late 16th century, artists began to depict the Twelve Apostles with crosses in their hands and, for the most part, these crosses are of the first variant of Gondär crosses.

An example of this can be found in wall paintings in Däṭṭä Asa church. The Apostles are depicted each holding a miniature Gondär cross with a long thin handle and large rectangular base, the artist skilfully reproducing the iron crosses in the fashion of the period (fig. 106). On one of the pilasters of the church *Abba*

Yohānni, founder of the monastery, is depicted. His cross is similar to that of the Apostles, but there is a colourful wide protective cotton cloth hanging on a ring attached to the base of the cross (fig. 107). Another example is the twin portrayal of *Abunä* Täklä Haymanot and *Abunä* Ewostatewos in the wall paintings at Däbrä Sina Maryam Church at Gorgora on the northern shore of Lake Ṭana. The paintings are executed in Gondär style, but their established date of origin varies from the early to mid-17th century. Each saint carries a cross which is a miniature of the open Gondär processional cross (fig. 108). A number of similar iron crosses were produced during the following centuries (fig. 190).

Other 17th-century wall paintings show examples of the continuation of the oldest forms of the cross. These are the wall paintings in the cave church of Yohānnəs (St John, Son of Thunder) at Mä'aquddi in the Valley of Gära'altä. During the reign of Fasilädas, its walls were covered with paintings showing religious and historic figures, including the ruler himself. They are depicted in a local style which is strikingly different from the Gondär style. The figures are set in rows on the northern wall of the church and each is shown holding a hand cross (fig. 109) which is very similar to those appearing on Aksumite coins, as well as those found in Waša Mika'el and Gännätä Maryam, except for the fact that the above hand crosses have a large base at the bottom of the handle as well as a protective cloth.

As to actual crosses of this era, the majority are missing inscriptions and therefore it is not possible to decide whether a particular cross was produced in the 17th or 18th century. The fact that they generally are copies of processional crosses offers the possibility of assigning them broadly to that period. One instance is the hand cross owned by Konalä Däbräḥayl church dedicated to the Four Living Creatures and situated a short distance from Haggärä Sälam in Tämben (fig. 110). The cross was used for blessing or incensing during the liturgy and is partly made of brass at the top and bottom, but joined by an iron handle. The cube-shaped brass base appears to indicate the stylistic changes that occurred in the 16th and 17th century. In its basic formation, this cross is similar to the processional cross of Aṣe Yohānnəs I (fig. 114), with the exception of the large patée crosses at the tips of the finials.

The next stage in the evolution of the crosses of the period is exemplified by the brass hand cross also used during the liturgy and owned by 3nda Šəllase in Adwa. It is a fairly precise reproduction of the 17th- or 18th-century Horn of the Lamb processional crosses (Moore 1971: 48–49, fig. 44). The arms are curled, their rounded tips touch each other and the barbs and diamond-shaped finials correspond to the characteristics of this type of cross. Furthermore, the protuberant spine running along the handle up to the point where the arms cross is an imitation of the shaft. A 17th- or 18th-century innovation is a cross with a large base with crosslets at each tip as well as a diamond-shaped form ornamented with crosslets which is attached at the bottom (*fig. 111*). Another cross of the same category is kept at Däbrä Gənfal in Tāmben. Once again, its basic form is of the Horn of the Lamb, but its arms are slender, a crosslet replaces the finials and tiny barbs appear at the intersection of the cross's arms. The square base was possibly added at a later date (*fig. 112*).

Crosses of the kind became the models for carved wooden crosses, and some examples are still in existence in spite of the fragile material used. One of them found at Agobo Čärqos church in Aşbi-Dära region is a fine reproduction carved in hard wood of the metal cross described above. The cross is studded with pieces of coloured glass according to the fashion of ornamenting crosses in the 18th century and it is quite possible that this cross originated from that century (*fig. 113*). Generally, crosses ascribed to the 17th century look very similar to those which were created in the following century and had a greater possibility of survival. Speculation on the precise age of both 17th- and 18th-century hand crosses is rather tenuous.

Processional (Blessing) Crosses

In addition to the prescribed use during the liturgy, processional crosses were also displayed at funerals, and particularly those of the heads of monasteries. The latter is inferred from the Vita or *gädlä* or biography of Ananya, who was Abbot of Däbarä Šärabi, close to present-day Mäqälä, who was killed during his pastoral travels. Upon receiving the news of his tragic death, the monks of his monastery went to the place, took his body and carried it back,

holding crosses, probably processional, and incense burners in front and behind Ananya's body (Lusini 1990: 162). The *gädlä* was probably written centuries after the death of Ananya, between the mid-16th and the early 17th century, and thus, the story reflects the customs practised at the time when it was written (Lusini 1990: 150).

Processional crosses were also used on more joyful occasions. As a young man, Ləbnä Dəngəl's son, Minas, was taken captive by Adal invaders in the 1530s, but later his ransom was paid by his brother, Gälawdewos, 1540–1559. When Minas arrived at the residence of his mother, Säblä Wängel, the monks and priests "took crosses and thuribles and dressed in vestments to welcome him according to the custom" (Kropp 1988: 49). Šärša Dəngəl, 1563–1597, the son of Minas, travelled to Aksum in January 1579 to be crowned as required by royal custom. The chronicle records that the priests received him carrying a golden cross and silver thurible and about a dozen umbrellas. Also the heads of the surrounding monasteries in Təgre and Šire arrived, each wearing ceremonial vestments, and carrying processional crosses and thuribles (Conti Rossini 1955: 89).

There are virtually no depictions of processional crosses in paintings of the period and thus inscriptions found on crosses are the surest method to determine their date of origin. This is the case of the silver cross in the collection of the IES Museum, no. 4466, Addis Abäba, which – according to the inscription – Aşe Yoħannəs I, 1667–1682, and his wife Säblä Wängel, gave to the Holy Trinity church at Wifat. Eine Moore designated the cross as of the Open Gondär type (Moore 1971: 49, figs. 35–40). Another silver and gilded cross was given by the same ruler and his wife to the "Striking of His Head (Kur'atä rä'əsü)" church at Kämä that it may be for the "medicine [salvation] of their body and soul". The cross is now in the possession of Getesemane church in G'änča Valley, Eastern Goğğam (*fig. 114*). The date of origin of both crosses, therefore, depends on the years of Yoħannəs' reign.

Another royal cross, no. 4070 in the IES Museum, is very similar to those described above, and the inscription on it bears the name of Iyasu. It is very likely that the name refers to Iyasu I, 1682–1706, son and successor of Yoħannəs I (Moore 1971: 36–37, fig. 36). The discovery of three royal crosses dated between 1667

and 1706 roughly indicates the period when they were in fashion as well as the place of their production. Being commissioned by royal patrons, they were unquestionably produced in the Gondär workshops. Although characteristic of 17th-century processional crosses, few crosses of the category survived. One heavily damaged brass cross is still kept in the church storage at Däbra Maryam zä-Hayda in Šire (*fig. 164*) and the second, which is made of iron, is in the collection of the IES, no. 4492, in Addis Abäba (Moore 1971: 46–47, *fig. 33*), and there are, as usual, some variant forms of these crosses.

Crosses Attached to Ornamental Chains

The wearing of gold chains was apparently an old tradition at the royal court when in 1523 Alvares and three other members of the Portuguese embassy received from Ləbnä Dəngəl “gold chains with crosses on them” (Alvares 1961: 406). The chronicler of Šärša Dəngəl recorded that in March 1588, Bădančo, the heathen king of 3nnarya, a vassal country, was baptised along with many of his subjects. He received the Christian name of Zămaryam, or (son) of Mary, and Šärša Dəngəl was his godfather. The newly baptised king received richly adorned robes as well as gold chains with crosses attached. According to the chronicler, these were “of beautiful workmanship” (Conti Rossini 1955: 139). Half a century later, Manoel Barradas noted that around their necks, the noblemen wore very beautiful and intricate gold chains usually with crosses hanging from them (Barradas 1996: 62).

Part VI: 18th-Century Crosses

Throughout the first half of the 18th century, the Gondär monarchy began to lose political control over the country, and during the second half of the century it finally collapsed, ushering in one hundred years of rule by powerful provincial lords, each of them becoming quasi independent in his province, while each was occupied with the constant battle for supremacy.

In the early 18th century, three rulers of the Gondär era each left a distinctive mark on the development of art in the Empire: Băkaffa, 1720–1730, his son Iyasu II, 1730–1755, and particularly his mother, 3tege Məntəwwab, who was de facto ruler through-

out the entire reign of her son and continued to exert great influence until her death in 1769 (Crummey 2000: 94–99). During this time of relative stability, silversmiths, some of whom were foreign residents, flourished and there are records concerning some of the activities of the latter. Iron mongers were reputed for the outstanding quality of their production, including crosses. With the outbreak of civil wars and disorder, during the second half of the century, concurrent activities by silversmiths developed in the towns of the provinces, with Təgray foremost among them.

The early 18th century saw important changes in painting when a new style known as the Second Gondär style developed, and this, in turn, influenced the production of crosses. The basic Horn of the Lamb form created during the 16th century and widely established during the 17th century evolved into new variants, and a completely new category of crosses emerged.

Hand Crosses

In *Zena narga* or the Story of Narga, an 18th-century description of the foundation of the church on Narga, a small island on Lake Tana, Iyasu II and his mother Məntəwwab, are both mentioned as the donors of many sacred objects. Among them was a “golden cross” which apparently was of the large blessing type and listed as a particular gift to the *mămhər* or head of the church. The cross was used for the induction ceremony of young men who had chosen to become monks. They were each given their cowls and blessed with the cross, both gestures being a symbolic expression of the obligation to maintain their chastity (Euringer 1933: 299).

The missionary, Remedius Prutky, noted a previously unknown custom which was practised during the liturgy of the Mass. “Outside the presbytery curtains stands just one monk. In his hand [is] a stick marked at its point with a tiny cross. The monk, as presenter, makes different gestures, moves his head up and down and side to side, while the whole congregation follows and imitates his every movement” (Prutky 1991: 232).

It was a customary practice in Ethiopia on taking an oath to kiss the cross extended by the priest who was present at the occasion. It was possible, however, to withdraw an oath, an advantage of which Aše Tăklä Giyorgis availed himself. He was deposed six

times from 1779 to 1800 and became reputed for his deceitfulness. Nathaniel Pearce, a British soldier who resided in the country from 1810 to 1819, described the situation as follows: "Tecla never hesitated about taking the oath, but would immediately kiss the cross when presented to him by the priest". However, as soon as the ecclesiastic has gone from his presence, he would say to the officers who attended upon his person: "See, I scrape from my tongue, which made the oath and touches the cross, all it has uttered". And saying this he would put his tongue between his teeth, and drawing it in, would spit and exclaim: "When the rebel comes, do your duty as I shall order you" (Pearce 1831: 274–275).

The 17th-century types of hand crosses previously described continued to be produced, with the Horn of the Lamb variant being in great favour, and the paintings of the period illustrating the trend. The cross depicted on the back of one panel of a chain of four panels, no. 1349 in the IES Museum in Addis Abāba, is clearly of that kind (*fig. 115*). In a triptych no. 5976, also in the IES collection, in their right hands *Abunä Täklä Haymanot* and *Abunä Ewostatewos* both carry similar crosses and they appear to be made of brass; the first, however, is more slender than the second. Both saints hold cloths into which the crosses can be wrapped whenever necessary (*fig. 116*). The same saints depicted in triptych no. 3673–74 in the IES collection carry similar crosses, but these appear to be made of iron (*fig. 117*). On the side panel of pendant diptych no. 3795 in the same museum, a certain saint is shown holding a slender iron cross which apparently is of the fleury type and the base at the bottom of the handle is comparatively large (*fig. 118*). Two crosses made of brass are depicted in an 18th-century illuminated manuscript of various texts, mainly referring to the Virgin Mary. The miniature shows Bishop *Däqsəyos* (Ildefons) offering to the Virgin a book of her miracles, and it also includes a depiction of a false bishop punished because he unjustly occupied his seat (*fig. 119*). Both hold hand crosses which are miniature copies of 17th-century processional cross (*fig. 114*). During the 18th and 19th century, diamond-shaped crosses also appear to have been in favour and this continued until the 20th century. A cross of this kind is depicted in triptych no. 3979 in the IES Museum, Addis Abāba, which presumably is made of silver (*fig. 120*).

The crosses are usually made of brass. An example of this kind of cross is to be found at *Abunä Tomas* Monastery or *Däbrä Maryam zä-Hayda* in Šire. It bears all the salient characteristics of the kind, including the square base with crosslets at four angles as well the extended ornamentation at the bottom (*fig. 191*). Also iron crosses ascribed to the 18th and early 19th century are known to exist. The cross in *Guya Täklä Haymanot* in *Tämben* probably was hammered by a country blacksmith (*fig. 192*).

The glory of Ethiopian cross production, however, during the 17th and 18th century is best represented by the wooden crosses which were used during the liturgy and church ceremonies. Since they are large – usually more than 40 cm long, the largest extended to over 60 cm – it was probably more practical to make them of wood than of metal. Even the high nobility donated wooden crosses to churches instead of metal ones. *Ras Wäldä Šəllase*, supreme lord of *Təgray* during the late 18th and early 19th century, donated a large wooden cross to *Ruba K'isa Giyorgis* church situated close to *Haggärä Šälam*, as a "medicine for his soul and body" (*fig. 121*). An unusually large wooden cross is preserved at *Hašbo Iyäsus* or *Däbrä Šəhay* close to *Aksum*, and although broken and crudely repaired, it is still very impressive. The pattern of its ornamentation is typical of 18th-century crosses (*fig. 122*).

Because wooden crosses were usually made by individuals who were not employed in workshops as was the case with metal crosses, they tend to show more of their creator's originality. Four crosses, all ascribed to the 18th or early 19th century, illustrate this. An unknown wood carver closely reproduced the first variant of the 17th-century patée cross. His efforts were focused on the ornamental pattern of the handle into which he incorporated a sense of vibrance, the material dictating the softness of the design (*fig. 193*). The carver of a second cross which is still used for the liturgy at *Däbrä Bānkol* had perfectly balanced the upper part of it and given it straight arms and a greatly enlarged base filled with an ornamental motif particularly favoured in 17th-century wood carvings. Due to the straight arms, the cross is locally designated as *qāranyo mäsqäl* or Cross of the Crucifixion (*fig. 123*). The carver of another cross used for measuring paces during the liturgical dance by church cantors at the Four Living Creatures or *arba'ətu*

ansäsa church at Kiyazba K^waqa in Tämben animated the usual 17th-century ornamental pattern with spreading zig-zag lines (*fig. 194*). Finally, the creator of the cross for incensing at Ruba K^wisa adopted the diamond shape and enlivened its static character within a pattern of zig-zags and stars as well as crosses, a difficult feat of artistry considering the challenges of working with wood (*fig. 124*).

The Agobo Čärqos church in Aşbi-Dära has a number of the crosses rendered remarkable by their incrustation with pieces of glass. Claude Lepage was the first to draw attention to this interesting expression of local aesthetics and he ascribed them to the 17th or 18th century (Lepage 1975: 78–79). One cross of this kind was described as belonging to the 17th century. However, another example is the cross in which the diamond frame is skilfully combined with the arms of a patée cross. In fact, this is a simplified copy of the 18th-century intricate-edged type of processional crosses (*fig. 125*).

Processional (Blessing) Crosses

Processional crosses are mentioned in the royal chronicle of Iyasu II, which states that in March 1747, his mother, Məntəwwab, journeyed to Lake Ṭana and visited the Church of St Stephen (Zṣṭifaanos), on the island of Däga. The priests there received her, wearing crowns, carrying a cross and umbrellas, and singing psalms (Guidi 1954: 151). This is believed to have been a processional cross.

Among the large number of processional crosses produced during the 18th century, two main types evolved. One included crosses with a distinctly diamond-shaped outline and the second was known as the intricate-edged type. The edges of the diamond-shaped crosses are only slightly indented, usually with two pierced scallops and cross in between each of the four sides. Also, the finials are diamond-shaped and occasionally surmounted by crosses. The upper ends of the broad lower arms are spherical and a small cross is attached to each of them. The crosses are usually large and remarkable for their engravings of figures depicting various religious motifs. In some crosses, the prostrate figures represent the suppliant donors.

Similar to 15th-century processional crosses, the 18th-century crosses had a double function – one being a sign of Christ's Passion and the second acting as an icon – the major difference being their much larger size, their style and the kinds of subjects engraved, as well as some technical aspects. The crosses of this type and their engravings were obviously greatly favoured by 18th-century patrons. One brass thinly gilded processional cross, no. 4345 in the IES collection (Moore 1971: 53–54, *figs. 39–40*), is diamond-shaped. Its form, however, evolved from 17th-century crosses and the details still possess their characteristics, while the quality of the engravings point to the 18th century (*fig. 126*). The cross bears two inscriptions and one inscription reads that it was written in the year when Täklä Giyorgis was the *nəguś* or king. This probably refers to Aše Täklä Giyorgis and signifies that the cross was already in existence during the late 18th century.

A second thinly gilded brass cross, IES Mus. 4193, was jointly commissioned by Iyasu II and Məntəwwab, and this was recorded in the inscription. This cross serves as an important reference in terms of the chronology of 18th-century crosses. It has figures engraved on both its faces. On one face, the prostrate figure of Məntəwwab – designated Wälättä Giyorgis, which is her baptismal name – beseeches the Virgin Mary and Child engraved on the vertical arm of the cross, while St George is engraved on the right horizontal arm (*fig. 127a*). On the obverse, Iyasu II, styled as King of Kings, is shown prostrate and beseeching the Holy Trinity, which is engraved on the vertical arm of the cross, while Christ teaching the Apostles is engraved on the right arm (*fig. 127b*). The youthful appearance of Iyasu would suggest the early 1740s as the date of origin. Məntəwwab and her son thus established a new fashion of portrayals on processional crosses. They evidently commissioned the cross at one of the Gondär silversmith workshops. Moreover, Greeks, Syrians or Armenians from the Near East and Copts from Egypt had immigrated into Ethiopia and some were either jewellers or silversmiths. They intermarried with local women and formed a class of artisans serving the needs of the royal family, high nobility and clergy. Prior to the 18th century, there is no mention of their existence, until James Bruce visited Ethiopia and recorded the presence of twelve silversmiths, some of whom were

Christians from Smyrna, who had immigrated in 1736 or shortly before and joined the small group of expatriate workers or their descendants. According to Bruce, they excelled in fine filigree work, and Məntəwwab and her son made extensive use of their services (Bruce 1813: II, 633–634).

We assume that throughout the 18th century a large number of very fine processional crosses of a similar type were produced in the Gondär workshops for many churches, both within the town and its environs. Many were removed from their place of origin due to unsettled conditions which developed throughout the late 18th and entire 19th century. Additionally, the subsequent sales of crosses during the late 20th century makes it difficult – if not impossible – to establish with certainty their place of origin.

Another cross of the same type is located at Däbrä Gärima in the region of Adwa. The silver cross corresponds to the main characteristics of the diamond-shaped crosses. However, its outline is more elaborate due to additional ornamentation consisting of large patée crosses set between the finials and flanked by two crosslets fixed on a hollowed arch. There is an unusual array of thinly gilded figures as well as the prostrate outline of the supplicant engraved below the figure of the Virgin Mary (*fig. 128*). The supplicant is identified as *Ras Mika'el*, while another inscription engraved close to the image of the Resurrection explains that he donated the cross to the “*Abba Gärima [monastery]*”. The figure undoubtedly represents *Ras Mika'el Səḥul* or Michael the Astute, an 18th-century political figure, who around 1746 established himself as an independent ruler in Təgray and in 1759 proclaimed himself as *ras* or supreme chief and became all-powerful in Gondär until his death in 1771 (Guidi 1954: 214–267). Adwa, his capital city, was a great centre of trade along the Red Sea coast and probably it was during his time that it became the home of silversmith workshops and continued to be reputed throughout the following century. The cross in question was probably produced there and it displays good workmanship. It also demonstrates the initial stage of the evolution of a certain pattern of processional crosses in Təgray which achieved its highest point during the following century.

A brass diamond-shaped processional cross, at Däbrä Gənfal Šəllase or the Monastery of the Trinity in Tämben, was donated to

this monastery according to the inscription by *Haše* or *Aše Admas*. In the rather confusing second half of the inscription, the name *Täklä Haymanot(?)* is mentioned. The royal name of *Aše Täklä Haymanot II*, 1769–1777, was *Admas Säggäd II*, and he could well be the donor of the cross. A rather crude set of figures and motifs in Second Gondär style is engraved by an untrained hand (*fig. 195*).

Finally, the diamond-shaped cross treasured at Wäynamä Kidanä Məḥrät church in Eastern Goğgam bears 18th-century engravings and probably was acquired in Gondär. This serves to establish the fact that this type of cross was favoured throughout the country. Its shape and details are similar to the previous cross except for the engravings which generally show diversity and imagination in the presentation of its subject matter (*fig. 129*).

In the second type of 18th-century processional crosses with intricate edges, the tips of the arms touch each other. The oval space thus formed between is either ornamented with trefoil crosses on both ends or an ornamental cross-piece which bridges its two extremities. The finials are always diamond-shaped with small rings at either side and surmounted by closed patée and diamond-shaped crosses. The design is further elaborated with two hollowed half circles and a cross in between. The wide lower arms are flat and broad, their tops shaped either into a grotesque human face or a bird's head. Although the type evolved from the diamond-shaped crosses, it gives the impression of lightness, while the contrast between the cut metal and empty background creates the pattern. The incised figures, however, are also an important part of the ornamentation.

In both categories, the cross is inserted into a long shaft, the tip of which extends to the centre and is ornamented with two or three rounded mouldings. The crosses of the first and second categories are always constructed of separate parts and fixed together by the process of hammering, nailing or welding. Eine Moore, who was the first to identify and describe the above two types of crosses, has ascribed them to the 18th century (Moore 1971: 54–69, *figs. 41–54*). The date of origin of the diamond-shaped crosses is corroborated by the inscriptions incised on them, while the dating of the intricate-edged type is justified by the 18th-century characteristic of the engraved figures (Moore 1971: 54–58, *figs. 41–44*).

In fact, the only known dated intricate-edged processional cross originates from the last decade of the 18th century (*fig. 196*). According to the inscription, the cross was given by *Däggazmač* Wäldä Šəllase to the church of Šəllase in Čäläqot, 3ndäarta, the town of which he was a patron. Wäldä Šəllase emerged as *ras* and the ruler of Təgray in 1790 and he was in power until his death in 1816. His town of residence was Anṭalo, situated a short distance from Čäläqot, which became a trade centre of some significance and also the home of numerous craftsmen (Pankhurst 1982: 201–210). Since it was also a place which attracted foreign residents, some probably were working with silver. The cross in question is currently in the possession of Däbrä Gənfal Šəllase in Tāmben. It is thinly gilded and ornamented with several engraved religious motifs as well as a portrait of the donor. According to the inscription, this was a certain Zena Giyorgis, probably a silver-smith in Anṭalo who made the cross during the last decade of the 18th century, since the title of *däggazmač* is used by Wäldä Šəllase in the inscription instead of the title *ras*. It seems likely that this cross set the pattern for the production of many processional crosses throughout the following century.

During the 18th century, skilful wood carvers also produced processional crosses. One such cross is located at Agobo Čärqos and is a simpler copy of the intricate-edged pattern and additionally ornamented with pieces of broken glass (*fig. 130*). The form of a second cross ornamented with pieces of glass in Dägu Maḥbär Šädqan church, near Aksum (*fig. 131*), was inspired by 17th- and 18th-century forms of processional crosses (*figs. 115, 130*).

Staffs Surmounted with Crosses

In one of the wall paintings at the church of Yoḥannəs at Mä‘aquddi, all holy figures carry prayer staffs in their left hands, which would indicate that the use of long staffs topped with a cross were no longer in favour (*fig. 109*). There is, however, a miniature painted in the Second Gondär style in the late 17th-century(?) Psalter no. Ms. or fol. 596 in the collection of the Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, which represents the biblical King David bringing the tablets of the Covenant to Jerusalem. The scene is entirely transformed into an Ethiopian ceremonial occa-

sion. In front of David, the head priest, probably Zadok, carries the tablets on his head and holds a wooden staff surmounted with a large cross which appears to be of the 17th-century Gondär style (*fig. 112*) and which is precisely delineated (*fig. 132*). On its lower arms hangs the protective cloth or *säbän*. The priest is walking under an umbrella having on top a ball surmounted by a cross, which is similar to *sändäq* or the sign used on the tops of royal tents as well as those of the nobility (Hammerschmidt 1977: 26, 42, *fig. 95*). Very few similar umbrellas have survived in church store-houses, while *sändäq* signs, which have been detached from them, are still in existence.

Part VII: 19th- and 20th-Century Crosses

During the first half of the 19th century, the division of the Empire resulted in the creation of semi-independent political units, among them Təgray, which was ruled in sequence by three members of the local nobility. Gondär and Central Ethiopia were ruled by an Oromo dynasty, and Šäwa became an independent kingdom with an Amhara dynasty claiming to be of the Solomonic line.

The second half of the 19th century saw the first unsuccessful attempt to restore a central government by Aše Tewodros, 1854–1868, the continuation of the civil war and finally the British-led expedition in 1868, which brought about the end to his rule. A side effect of this event proved to be of great importance to the production of crosses. The Təgrean Prince Kaša subsequently succeeded in taking over the Imperial throne as Yoḥannəs IV, 1872–1889, and in establishing his supremacy over the entire country. He also defeated invading Egyptian forces and contained Italian encroachments. Finally in 1889, Mənilək II ascended the throne and from this time forward the Šäwan dynasty continued until 1974. In 1896, Mənilək defeated the Italians at Adawa. He also began the modernisation of the country and opened it to the outside world, a trend which intensified under the rule of Aše Ḥaylä Šəllase I, 1930–1974. These changes in the political scene and contacts with abroad necessarily affected the development of towns, as well as the centres of metalwork, including the production of crosses.

Throughout the 19th century, Gondär was regularly plundered and became a city of ruins. However, it still maintained some im-

portance as a political, commercial and ecclesiastical centre of the country. Craftsmen on a more specialised level than in most parts of the country were still active and their products sought after, while among them renowned jewellers, silversmiths and blacksmiths must have turned out a substantial number of crosses.

Gradually, Gondär became politically and economically overshadowed by Anṭalo and then Adwa, the capitals of the powerful lords of Təgray. Adwa maintained its position as an emporium throughout the 19th century. The patronage of the rulers and commercial contact with the outside world led to the presence of resident foreigners, among them a Greek silversmith whose name was Mika'el, and Yoḥannəs, an Armenian blacksmith. A long-standing tradition of working with precious metals made Adwa a well known centre for cross production. This reputation increased considerably when *Ras* Alula ʒngəda, ca. 1849–1897, the favourite administrator and military commander of Yoḥannəs IV, in addition to the ruler himself, both became great patrons of the Adwa jewellers. The crosses produced there mark a stylistic evolution which had begun in the 18th century.

In Šäwa, two towns – Ankobär and Angoläla – included the residences of *Nəguś* Šahlä Šəllase, 1813–1847. In both towns and the surrounding areas, there were also places of trade and craftsmanship, the king being keenly interested in both. In Ankobär, there were royal workshops where – according to British diplomat William Harris – “all manner of curious amulets and devices” were produced (Harris 1844: II, 262). In Mähäl Wänz, there was another royal workshop, where Harris observed hard-working blacksmiths, armourers, jewellers and illuminators of manuscripts (Harris 1844: II, 32). In an environment of such extensive and sophisticated activity, crosses must have been produced, although Harris does not mention it expressly. The French travellers Combes and Tamisier recorded the great number of craftsmen also employed in the royal workshops of Angoläla, some of them working in gold, silver and ivory (Combes 1838: II, 349). It could certainly be inferred that crosses were part of their output.

In the late 19th century, Däbrä Marqos in Goḡḡam became the seat of *Ras* Adal, who became *Nəguś* Täklä Haymanot, 1882–1902. The town evolved into an important trade and craft

centre, with strong cultural attachments to Gondär. Given the fact that the Goḡḡam population continued to be very devout Christians, a large number of metal neck and hand crosses were either locally produced or brought from Gondär along with high quality processional crosses.

Finally in 1893, Addis Abäba, the new capital of the extended Empire, became a major centre of commerce and cross production. Gifted Ethiopian silversmiths and those of Armenian extraction served the court, affluent members of society, and an increasing number of foreign residents and tourists. Accordingly, they created crosses that appealed to this particular market. At this time, a great number of less sophisticated silversmiths turned out a large number of traditional neck and hand crosses for a wide segment of the population, and these were broadly distributed throughout the country.

Wooden hand crosses continued to be produced. However, workshop craftsmen replaced monks and hand-carving with knives was replaced by mechanical tools. Although monks occasionally continued to bring hand-carved crosses to the market, on the whole, the clergy in the countryside increasingly acquired their crosses in larger centres. The traditional art of carving wooden crosses was gradually dying out.

At the same time, the introduction of the Maria Theresa dollar in the Red Sea region at the end of the 18th century provided easily obtainable silver for the production of crosses. Moreover, an unprecedented importation of silver occurred during the British expedition in 1868. Subsequent massive imports throughout the remainder of the century and in the first half of the 20th century brought about a dramatic change in cross production, and silver crosses were generally the most popular. These developments, in turn, provide certain indications in terms of dating crosses. In general, crosses made of silver are ascribed to the period following 1868.

Neck Crosses

Since Alvares wrote about the widespread use of neck crosses in the 16th century, it appears likely that the custom continued among the higher classes, but until the 19th century there are no existing

written records confirming this. In the early 1960s, however, when restoration work was undertaken at Lalibāla in view of its increasing accessibility to tourism, the author came upon mummified bodies wearing wooden neck crosses. Some of these were lying in the niches cut into the walls surrounding Betā Mādḥane ‘Alām church. Given that wooden neck crosses were traditionally buried with their owners, the crosses decomposed along with their bodies. This probably accounts in part for the scarcity of wooden neck crosses. Prior to the 20th century, neck crosses do not appear in Ethiopian paintings. On the other hand, beginning with the early 19th century, neck crosses can be seen in the images of Ethiopian rulers which began to be reproduced in travellers' books. The *Nəguś Šahlä Šəllase* of Šäwa is shown wearing a conspicuous neck cross (Bartnicki 1987: 201). A portrait of the same ruler is featured in the 1845 edition of the French journal, *L'illustration*. He is shown wearing a small patée neck cross attached to a narrow band of cotton (Pankhurst 1968: 3). The son of Šahlä Šəllase, Ḥaylā-Mäläkot, 1847–1855, was shown wearing a Latin or Greek cross with the lower arm slightly elongated (Bartnicki 1987: 210). *Aṣe Mənilək* in a contemporary publication wears a neck cross similar to that of his father, Ḥaylā-Mäläkot, on a narrow cotton band. He seems to also be wearing a traditional *matäb*, closely tied around his neck (Henze 2000: 142–147).

During the 19th century, travellers' books became illustrated with pictures of people and local scenes. In a mid-century depiction of a noblewoman in Šäwa, a nun accompanying her is shown wearing a neck cross – probably of the Greek type – attached to a metal necklace. In her right hand, the nun also holds a staff topped with a cross (Bernatz 1852: pl. 11). Noblewomen in Šäwa, as observed by Rochet d'Héricourt, wore bracelets as ornaments and a cord on which a small Maltese copper cross was attached (Rochet d'Héricourt 1841: 271). It appears, however, that among the common people, the wearing of crosses was less widely practised. This can be inferred from the portrayals of six women in the plates accompanying a French description of Ethiopia in the early 19th century. None of the women is depicted wearing a cross (Lefèbvre 1849: pl. 27).

In the second half of the same century, Augustus Wylde ob-

served that the women of Təgre wore a necklace to which was tied a thick silver ring or crucifix, cross or picture of the Virgin, or the Saviour, or sometimes a charm to keep the wearer from harm or the evil eye (Wylde 1889: I, 281). Another British traveller, Powell-Cotton, listed the jewellery commonly worn in Addis Abāba at the turn of the 20th century and among them are plain and filigree crosses, most of which, in fact, were granulated neck crosses (Powell-Cotton 1902: 107–116). In Aksum, a boy wearing a cross on a dark cord was photographed by a member of the German Aksum Expedition in 1906 (Lüpke 1913: 93, fig. 246).

It is clear that devout Christians wore neck crosses. In 1873, the Italian traveller Carlo Piaggia visited the Qorāta region on the eastern side of Lake Ṭana, and observed nuns wearing a large crucifix (*crocefisso*) around their necks, and a few little metal medallions with images of the saints and the odd little cross in silver fastened by a plain string (Romitti 1986: 115, 223). C.H. Walker also recorded that priests and deacons wore small neck-cords with tiny wooden crosses suspended on them (Walker 1933: 112).

At times it seems to be a combination of the *matäb* and the cotton cord on which a cross or the crosses and a few trinkets are attached. In the present-day countryside, Ethiopian Christians wear neck crosses and/or have crosses tattooed on their foreheads. Although a few basic types of simple crosses made from inexpensive material are generally accepted, local differences exist depending on the owner's means and the kinds of material available. For example, a farmer's wife usually buys crosses from vendors at the weekly market and therefore her choice is rather limited. At the Adwa weekly market, for example, a few vendors sell crosses and one hand is sufficient to display items offered for sale (fig. 133). They are crudely made of brass or copper, and recently even of plastic. More affluent farmer's wives wear silver or copper crosses dipped in silver – traditionally wearing two or three of them together. Either the crosses are a wedding gift from her husband or they were presented on a particular family occasion. They are suspended on thick cotton cords made of twisted black threads. In Təgray, neck crosses are mostly, but not exclusively, worn by women. One example is the wife of the head priest of a small country church close to Abiy Addi in Tāmben, who wears a tiny di-

amond-shaped cross made of pure silver (*fig. 134*). The type appears to be very common and whenever the woman is wearing two crosses, one is usually diamond-shaped while the second is a larger equal-armed cross which tapers towards the centre (*fig. 135*). Another woman encountered on the same 2004 field trip to Təgray wore two crosses, the smaller cross being of the patée type. Moreover, she had a large cross tattooed on her forehead. The photograph was taken on the way to Gənfal Šəllase (*fig. 136*). Many women also wear three crosses (*fig. 137*). It appears that the fashion of wearing more than one cross also occurs in other parts of the country. A girl at the Lalibäla market was wearing two silver crosses which, however, were attached on the same cotton cord, and for this reason the small diamond-shaped cross is scarcely visible. The large cross is characteristic for Lasta (*fig. 138*).

Women continued to wear crosses of various kinds. A small brass cross worn by a girl in Säwne, Agamä, is attached to the cord tightly wound round her neck (*fig. 139*). A farmer's wife living close to Lake Ašāngi wears a simple small wooden neck-cross on a loose cotton cord (*fig. 140*). A girl from Amba Alaği on the main road between Šäwa and Təgray wears the type of the cross which is common in any larger city market, including that of Addis Abäba (*fig. 141*). Elderly nuns and religious women on pilgrimages to different holy places may combine wearing crosses with a chain of wooden prayer beads (*fig. 142*). This is also practised by some old monks as well as hermits.

In Šäwa, men wear their crosses under their shirts and kindly allow them to be photographed (*fig. 197*). In Goğgam, which is an equally traditional Christian province, it became customary for young people of both sexes to wear large crosses – measuring up to 10 cm – which are distinctly of the Greek type with the lower arm, at times, slightly extended. They are always locally made, usually from copper, and the crosses are suspended on a finely plaited cotton cord which is rather long so that the cross hangs on the breast (*fig. 144*). Students of church schools wear similar crosses, and one of these was photographed at Yä-Godana Mika'el church close to Däbrä Marqos (*fig. 145*).

Monks also wear neck crosses. The *Māmḥər* or Abbot of Däbrä Maryam zä-Hayda in Šire kindly agreed to be photographed

with his three crosses: one, a wooden small neck-cross he wears under his shirt, the second, a large pectoral cross hanging on a chain, which is a sign of his status in the community of monks. Being a priest, his third is a hand cross (*fig. 143*).

Hand Crosses

Nineteenth-century travellers from abroad occasionally give more specific information relating to hand crosses. Early in the 19th century, Nathaniel Pearce noted that during the baptism ceremony the priest first swung a brass vase to and fro. The container, in which incense was kept burning, was suspended by four brass chains. The child wearing baptismal attire was then dipped into a large pan of water. Finally, the priest took a small wooden cross, uttered the prescribed words of the sacrament and repeated this while “he crossed every joint of the body, behind and before . . .” (Pearce 1831: 306).

Protestant missionaries Karl Isenberg and Johann Krapf described a somewhat different baptismal ceremony in Šäwa during the 1840s. A large jar filled with water was used as the baptismal font. After reciting the initial prayers, the priest consecrated the water with incense in one hand and a small cross in the other. Then, bowing over the water, he exclaimed “One Holy Father”, while at the same time drawing the cross through the water. He then repeated the recitation and made the gesture for the Son and the Holy Spirit, and finally proceeded to perform baptismal rites on those assembled for the purpose (Krapf 1968: 155–156).

In the 1830s, Combes and Tamisier saw a procession in Däbrä Wärq in Eastern Goğgam on the Feast of Epiphany when “certain priests” carried small iron crosses, while deacons carried crosses and “other objects necessary for the ceremony” (Combes 1838: III, 271). The fact that iron hand crosses were still in use is significant, although the crosses which the deacons carried were rather inconclusively described. Possibly, some were processional and others were incensing crosses.

There are also records of hand crosses being used for other important occasions. In 1844, the Metropolitan or Head of the Ethiopian Church, *Abunä Sälama III*, 1841–1867, sent four clergymen to Goğgam to establish peace between *Däğğazmač* Bərru

Goṣu, the provincial ruler of Goḡḡam, and *Ras* Ali II, the overlord residing in Däbrä Tabor in Bägemdär. The clergymen took with them a cross and a chair of the Metropolitan, both serving as credentials of a sort (Sergew Hable-Selassie 1993a: 42).

The French traveller Arnaud d'Abbadie, who resided in Ethiopia from the 1840's to the early 1850s, describes having seen monks who either carried a small rosary and a painted red fly-whisk made of horsehair or a small crudely carved wooden cross. Some monks wore such crosses on their skull-caps affixed to their foreheads by a strap (d'Abbadie 1980: II, 247–248). This practice appears to have fallen out of use and probably was not especially common in the past, although, it was traditional for priests, monks and hermits to carry a cross in one hand and prayer beads in the other. An 18th- or early 19th-century painting at Ala'äsa Mika'el in Tämben (fig. 146) shows a priest carrying both the prayer beads and the cross and the practice is still maintained by today's monks and nuns (fig. 142).

The massive import of silver in 1868 and the following decades offered the possibility of extensively using this metal for the production of hand crosses, while processional crosses were used as models. An example of this is a set of three large hand crosses still used for liturgy at Ruba K'isa Giyorgis church in Tämben (fig. 198). The cross on the left is an exemplary copy of the intricate-edged Gondarine processional cross; the cross in the middle is a small scale copy of a diamond-shaped cross, whose flat surface is enlivened with a strapwork pattern. The cross on the right is a somewhat schematised copy of the 18th-century Horn of the Lamb cross including a spine running along its handle (compare with fig. 111). Because of the roughly engraved figure of Christ, this is a Calvary cross. In all three crosses, elongated handles replace the shafts of processional crosses. The large rectangular base with small crosses at the four extremities and the intricate cross at bottom became an integral feature of most of the 19th- and early 20th-century hand crosses. The beautiful cross design of the attachments at the bottom of the base highlights the silversmith's skill and creativity.

The second set of 19th- and early 20th-century hand crosses at Dəngəlat Maryam (Däbrä Gännät) church close to Haggärä Sälam

are still in use today for performing the liturgy, and their forms evolved from the three basic types described above. Iron, brass and silver were the materials most frequently used, and there is a definite scarcity of wooden crosses in the area (fig. 147). Some crosses have engraved inscriptions either on their base or along their handles which give the names of the donors and the churches to which the crosses were given. However, it is generally difficult and often impossible to identify the individuals named.

There are some exceptions, however. One liturgy hand cross is located at Mädhane 'Alām church in Adwa. According to the inscription, it was given to the church by Kaša, that is, *Däḡḡazmač* Kaša Mərča, who in January 1872 was crowned emperor of Ethiopia and took the royal name of Yoḥannəs IV (fig. 148). It follows that the cross was produced after approximately 1850 and before 1872. It is a silver cross thinly gilded and demonstrates the taste of the noble patrons for heavy ornamentation, including the granulated and filigree work which is characteristic of 19th-century workshops in Təgray.

A second exception is also a liturgy hand cross which, according to the inscription, was given to Kidanä Məhrät church at May Anbäsa by *Däḡḡazmač* Gugsä, son of *Ras* Araya and grandson of *Aṣe* Yoḥannəs (fig. 201). Presently, however, the cross is located at 3nda Šəllase in Adwa. It is a large silver cross with a diamond-shaped framework filled with a net-pattern and its edges are ornamented with figures of looped crosslets and birds. Instead of the square base at the lower end of the handle, it incorporates a replica – on a smaller scale – of the cross at the top. The cross was probably created by Adwa silversmiths and is indicative of the introduction of a new design.

A third example is also a liturgical cross and made of thinly gilded silver. On both faces of the large base, the inscription informs the reader that the cross was donated to the same Mädhane 'Alām church by *Bägəron*d or Superintendent Mər'əd (Gäbrä) Šadäq (fig. 199). He probably was the same jeweller to *Aṣe* Yoḥannes, whose workshop Augustus Wylde visited in 1887. In reality, it appears that the cross was made by one of the gifted artisans in the *bägəron*d's workshop (Wylde 1889: 286–290). The cross is a replica on a small scale of the 15th-century processional

crosses with a diamond-shaped frame and crosslet-pattern along the edges (*fig. 184*) (Moore 1971: 17, *fig. 18*). The elongated handle is ornamented with a ring and a large base with a cross attached at the bottom. Both crosses are fine examples of the aesthetic standards of the period.

The next three examples are priests' personal crosses. Two were photographed in Goğgam and one in Šäwa, and they all date to the 20th century. One cross belongs to the priest serving Wändägi Däbrä Šäge Maryam church in Western Goğgam. This is an intricate-edged cross with a motif of circles which evolved in the Gondär workshops (*fig. 149*). The second cross belonging to the head of Däy Giyorgis church in Morät district, Eastern Šäwa, is distinctly a diamond-type cross (*fig. 150*). The third cross seen in the priest's hands at Adät in Eastern Goğgam is an imaginative elaboration of the Horn of the Lamb type (*fig. 151*). These three crosses are all evidence of the basic unity of the types of crosses throughout the country.

In spite of the universal appeal of metal crosses, wooden crosses continued to be produced in the 19th and 20th century, although to a lesser degree, with the carvers copying in their own way the basic types of crosses and the material dictating a general simplification of design. This is clearly the case with the wooden version of the Horn of the Lamb type of liturgy cross owned by Gotara Kidanä Məhrät church in Eastern Goğgam (*fig. 152*). Particularly successful is the contrast between the fluid frame and a straight-armed cross incorporated within it. In the next cross owned by Däbrä Bänköl, in the Aksum area, the opposite is achieved. A straight-armed cross is enlivened by its inner pattern which is filled with strapwork (*fig. 200*). Also noteworthy are the crosses in which their creators were inspired by early cross forms. The cross in Däbrä Maryam zä-Hayda clearly evokes the earliest type of patée crosses (*fig. 202*). In an imaginative vein, other country carvers incorporated figures with uncommon ornamental patterns. The large cross at Tātäma Šəllase close to Addigrat has the figure of Christ carved twice in such a way that it became a cross-in-fix (*fig. 153*).

Two particular kinds of crosses, both of which are almost exclusively made of wood, are in a class by themselves. The first

form with a figurative handle is extremely rare. Less than ten are known to exist in either public and private collections. Of the second form – designated “Hawaria” by a Polish collector – there are about twenty in existence. The place of origin of all these pieces is hypothetical, because they were acquired through Addis Abäba antique dealers. In addition, they bear no inscriptions, nor does comparable material suggest their age. This has led various scholars to theorise about their dates and places of origin and also about their provenance (Moore 1973: 224–225; Hecht 1989: 118–119 and 1990: 42; Mann 2001: 90; Girma Fisseha 2002: 110), but to date no supporting evidence has been put forth, although it is obvious that the crosses of both kinds were produced in the same region and conceived by individuals sharing the same cultural background.

Processional (Blessing) Crosses

In 1839, Théophile Lefèbvre described the official entry into Gondär of Abunä Sälama III, the Egyptian monk who became Head of the Ethiopian Church. Two rows of clergy advanced towards the new *abunä* and the chief priest offered him “the holy book” (undoubtedly the Gospels) to kiss, as well as several crosses which “as the Abyssinians say came miraculously from Heaven” (Lefebvre 1845: 30). Because of this belief – traditionally associated with processional crosses – the crosses extended to the *abunä* were most probably of that kind.

At the same time, Rochet d'Héricourt explored the kingdom of Šäwa. Rochet took part in Nəguś Šāhlä Šəllase's punitive expedition to the areas inhabited by the Oromo people and described the king's return to Angoläla, his usual place of residence. The clergy went out in a procession to welcome him (Rochet d'Héricourt 1846: 213). The scene was recorded by Bernatz in his album *Views of Ethiopia* and shows the priests carrying processional crosses (Bernatz 1852: pl. 13).

On some occasions, a cross was used to strengthen a plea for reconciliation. One such attempt was recorded by Arnault d'Abbadie. During the 1840s, Däggazmač Bərru revolted against his father, Däggazmač Gošu, ruler of Goğgam Province. When the two adversaries had assembled their troops and were prepared to en-

gage in battle, priests came forth from the churches, which had the right to offer asylum. The priests then gathered in front of the two armies, carrying crosses (no doubt processional) and banners, and successfully persuaded both sides to agree to a peaceful solution (d'Abbadie 1980: II, 136).

Processional crosses were also displayed during funerals, as is apparent from the narrative of Mansfield Parkyns. When a person died, all the priests from the local churches assembled and "all the relations of the deceased call from the housetops and send messengers to the neighbouring villages where, standing on eminences, they summoned the neighbours by crying aloud, 'the son or daughter of such a one is dead. Come to the funeral and bring the crosses and the incense bowls'" (Parkyns 1853: II, 60). It is clear from the text that Parkyns is referring to processional crosses.

In the latter part of the 20th century, the practice of displaying processional crosses on official occasions was still in evidence during the reign of Aṣe Ḥayä Šəllase I. When the Shah of Iran and his Empress visited Lalibäla in 1970, the priests came from all the local as well as surrounding churches and brought with them many processional crosses. All the crosses were centuries old, while some were among the oldest type of bronze cross. It was a unique sight which the author himself had the privilege of observing first-hand.

A remarkable aspect of the production of processional crosses during the 19th century was the emulation of design and the copying of old forms of crosses. The crosses still in existence provide many examples of this, one being a cross owned by Čäläqot Šəllase Church. Although the cross is unsigned, according to tradition it was given to the church by *Ras Wäldä Šəllase*, its founder and patron at the beginning of the 19th century (fig. 154). The sumptuous silver gilded cross is a close copy of Zär'a Ya'eqob's diamond-shaped cross (fig. 184), except for the rounded moulding on the shaft.

A similar cross was donated to 3nda Šəllase in Adwa by Yohannəs IV, in 1877 (Ethiopian calendar, ca. 1885 in the Gregorian calendar), except for the rosettes replacing cross-formed finials in the original and a small gilded diamond form studded with precious stones which is set in the centre – a rather pretentious embellishment dictated by the aesthetic trends of the period

(fig. 155). In various churches in Təgray, there are other diamond-shaped crosses mostly made of silver and thus, in all probability, their date of origin is the late 19th century.

Another type of cross favoured by supplicants/donors was the 17th–18th-century intricate-edged type. *Ras Alula ʿInḡəda* was presumably a great admirer of this type of cross and he donated several copies of such crosses to various churches. He donated two thinly gilded silver crosses of the type to "Däbrä Šəllase of Tämbe", which certainly means Gənfäl Šəllase church, where the crosses are still treasured possessions. The donation of one cross was a mutual gift from both him and his wife Wälättä Təklä-Haymanot (fig. 203) and was made during "the reign of the beloved king of kings" in the year of St Mark, 1877 (Ethiopian calendar). The second – a similar cross – belonged to the above Wälättä Təklä-Haymanot, who donated it to the same monastery "so that she would inherit the Kingdom of the Lord" while according to the second inscription on the same cross it was *Ras Alula* who gave the cross "to Däbrä Šəllase of Tämbe".

Intricate-edged crosses became characteristic of the 19th-century cross production in Təgray, and they show little variation in terms of detail, which consists either of joined or separate barbs or a design incorporating a rather repulsive human face or bird's head ornamentation of the lower arm and with crosslets replacing the rings. Typically, most of these crosses are embellished with engraved figures. A kind of fretwork design variation is a feature of the silver cross found at Ruba Wäyini Däbrä Gännät close to Haggärä Sälam (fig. 204) ascribed to the late 19th century.

Copies of 14th–15th-century crosses with a circular frame were also produced. A cross given by a certain Säbäne Giyorgis to Kidanä Məhrät or Covenant of Mercy at May Anbässa church in 3ndarta is virtually an exact – if somewhat heavier copy (fig. 156). The cross is made of silver, of which there was no scarcity in the late 19th century – a fact which provides additional support for dating the cross to that period. Another clear indication is the method of assembly from separately cast forms and also the place on the cross where the inscription was made.

Occasionally, wooden processional crosses were still produced during this period. According to the local priests, the round

cross located in Tā'aminä Maryam in Tāmben was carved during the reign of Yoḥannäs IV, but it was recently overpainted (*fig. 157*).

Carving crosses from wood was an entirely personal activity, or so it appears from the story of a processional cross in the Kidanä Məhrät church at May Aläqti situated 25 km south of Addisgrat. The head priest of the church, Kābbädä Mängäša, now seventy-eight years old, carved this processional cross when he was a twelve year-old boy and donated it to the church (*fig. 158*). The cross, which was carved in keeping with a child's imagination, is still being used today for religious occasions without any apparent objection.

Staffs Surmounted with Crosses

Long staffs surmounted with small plain crosses and carried by hermits are still a common sight in present-day Ethiopia. In the past, they appear to have been used by priests as well. Combes and Tamisier made the random remark that "older priests carry a kind of pastoral staff" (Combes 1838: III, 194), while Rochet d'Héricourt refers incidentally to a long stick which all priests carry in their hands (Rochet d'Héricourt 1846: 238).

Crosses Affixed to Church Roofs

Large crosses displayed at the pinnacles of churches belong to a tradition which was first recorded in the 15th century, when Zär'a Ya'eqob commanded the erection in Däbrä Bərhan of a palace which was surmounted with a cross of gold (Perruchon 1893: 23–27). In 1575, when Šäršä Dəngl was encamped at Dāmbya in the region of Lake Ṭana, Abba Nəway, the royal chaplain, arranged for two white tents to be pitched, which would serve as the camp churches and ordered a "golden cross" to be affixed over each of them. A similar cross was displayed on the top of the royal tent (Conti Rossini 1955: 75).

Similarly, the seven ostrich eggs or their imitations which are attached to the arms of this type of cross are a characteristic sight in the present-day Ethiopian landscape (*fig. 159*). The addition of these eggs is said to be an age-old practice, although Alvares and Almeida – both careful observers of church conventions – make no mention of the custom. The first allusion to their existence is

found in the eulogy of Iyasu I, which includes a description of how the church of Däbrä Bərhan Šəllase was built in Gondär. At the apex of its roof, a large gold cross was affixed with seven gold balls the size of ostrich eggs (Conti Rossini 1942: 76–81, 108–113). On the other hand, the text was written during the second decade of the 18th century and the information about "ostrich eggs" might refer to that period as opposed to the time of Iyasu. In addition, they are generally not common in illustrations in the 17th-century book of Miracles of Mary or *Tä'amra Maryam*. Either a ball or a rod is depicted at the top of the church. A rare exception is the cross with seven eggs which is found in a mid-17th-century miniature (*fig. 160*) and very occasionally in the latter part of the same century (*fig. 162*) – a fact which suggests that the custom existed at that time, but was not firmly established.

The same can be inferred from the 18th-century chronicle of the reign of Iyasu II. The church designated Däbra Šähay, which Iyasu's mother, Štege Məntəwwab, built at Q'əsqa'am near Gondär, is described in detail, including the intricate cross ornamentation on its rooftop (Guidi 1954: 120), but the chronicler is silent on the subject of the ostrich eggs. The paintings of the period, however, provide tangible evidence that ostrich egg ornamentation was then widespread and apparently became an integral part of the crosses affixed on the rooftops of churches (*fig. 161*).

In the early 19th century, the first written records of ostrich eggs in church ornamentation appeared in travellers' accounts of Abyssinia. Combes and Tamisier are probably the first to specifically describe having seen an iron cross with "many arms, all decorated with ostrich eggs" (Combes 1838: I, 183). Arnauld d'Abbadie noted that "usually one big Greek cross rises at the top of the roof of a church and the eggs of the ostriches are skewed onto some of the cross-bars; crosses of rich churches are made of copper and gilt and they shine from afar" (d'Abbadie 1980: I, 497).

Augustus Wylde was greatly impressed by the beauty of crosses decorating the roofs of churches which he saw in Təgre. He found the cross on the church of Šnda Šəllase at Adwa particularly attractive and wrote that it was of a "perfect Abyssinian pattern" (Wylde 1889: I, 299). He did not, however, mention the ostrich eggs.

Finally, members of the 1906 German Expedition to Aksum and the surrounding area recognised the singularity of this ornamentation on the pinnacles of churches. In their report, they devoted a special section of the text to this and illustrated it with many drawings (DAE 1913: III, 13–15).

Crosses Adorning Royal Crowns

At the end of the 17th century, Charles Poncet attended the procession of the August feast of the Assumption and he recorded having observed an official carrying the “imperial crown” which he described as being closed and adorned with a cross of precious stones at the top (Foster 1949: 117). In the only contemporary picture, which actually shows a royal crown, it is surmounted by a precious pearl and not a cross. The picture is found on fol. 19v of Ms. IES Lib 315 in Addis Abāba, believed to be Iyasu II’s book of prayers. The miniature depicts the royal crown carried by a page during Iyasu I’s return from his military expedition to the region of Gigbe River in 1704.

Beginning with the 17th century and continuing in subsequent centuries, in miniatures ornamenting the Book of Psalms, King David is represented playing a *bägāna*, an Ethiopian lyre, and wearing the crown surmounted by a cross. The king is wearing a similar crown in the depiction of the Ark of the Covenant being brought to Jerusalem (*fig. 132*) and of Christ giving the Covenant of Mercy to his mother (Annequin 1990: II, 61). In some miniatures representing the latter, the crown has a precious pearl at the top (Annequin 1990: 57). In fact, this precious pearl was lost during a period of internal strife after the death of Iyasu II. The chronicle of *Aṣe Täklä Giyorgis* (first reign 1779–1784) relates that when he was campaigning in Wällo, one of the local chiefs surrendered the pearl to him (Shiferaw Bekele 2004: 250). This suggests that these crowns, in fact, mirror those of Ethiopian sovereigns.

Crosses as Ornamentation on Umbrellas

Rochet d’Héricourt described the umbrellas used by King Šahlä Šəllase of Säwa. The king was riding a mule and was accompanied on either side by a servant holding over him “a canopy made of red

velvet and surmounted by a silver pommel with a small cross on the top” (Rochet d’Héricourt 1841: 102). This adornment was designated *sändäq* (*fig. 15*).

Author’s Commentary on the Dating of Crosses

In concluding this assessment and commentary on the dates of origin of Ethiopian crosses, it must again be stressed that the descriptions given of forms of crosses created throughout many centuries is by no means comprehensive in its scope. Crosses whose age was indicated in the inscription or by any other well-founded possibility were the major concern as a point of reference for ascribing an approximate age to the crosses. In this way, the framework has been laid for further elaboration on the evolutionary patterns of the Ethiopian cross. As an additional result of such a review, the phenomenon of the permanence of a few basic forms throughout many centuries of evolution became evident. The patée cross and its numerous variants emerged as a basic form, while countless generations of Ethiopian craftsmen have displayed remarkable virtuosity in embodying it with imaginative ornamentation.

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A

- Aaron, High Priest
 Abäyod, *Abba*, fig. 102
 Abba Bula, *see also* Abib
Abunä
 Abba Gärima, *see also*
 Däbrä Gärima
 Abba Šəhma, *see also* 3nda
 Abba Šəhma
 Abba Yoħanni, *see also*
 Däbrä Asa
 Abbadie, Arnauld d'
 Abib, *Abunä*, figs. 62, 76,
 118, *see also* Addis
 Abäba, IES Museum;
 Däbrä Šärabi
 Abiy Addi
 Abiyä 3gzi' *Abunä*
 Abraham, Old Testament
 Patriarch
 Abräntant, *see also* Däbrä
 Abräntant
 Abrəha Ašbəħa, church
 crosses in bas-relief,
 fig. 25
 Absadi, *Abba*, fig. 75, *see*
also Däbrä Šärabi, Acts
 of Ewostatewos
Abunä Tomas Monastery,
see also Däbrä Maryam
 zä-Hayda
Abunä Yəm'atä, *see also*
 3nda *Abunä* Yəm'atä
 Abydos
 Adäfa
 Adal Invasion
 Adal, *Ras*, *see also* Täklä
 Haymanot, *Nəguš*
 Adam skull of
 Adät, fig. 151
 cross, fig. 151
 Addi Wäfärti Maryam,
 figs. 2, 136
 Addigrat
 Addis Abäba
 chain painting, fig. 115
 crosses, figs. 103, 126,
 184–185
 IES Museum
 diptych, fig. 101
 pendant diptych, fig. 23
 triptychs, figs. 78,
 104–105, 116, 120
see also Crosses
adera, *see also* Nails of
 the Cross
 Admas, *Haše*
 Admas Säggäd II, *see also*
 Täklä Haymanot II
 Adrian VI, Pope
 Adwa
 3nda Šəllase crosses,
 figs. 111, 155, 201
 Madħane 'Aläm crosses,
 figs. 148, 199
 market, fig. 133
 Adwa Region, *see also*
 Däbrä Gärima
 African Ebony, fig. 67, *see*
also Dalbergia
melanoxylon
 Agamä
 Agäw
 Agobo Čärqos crosses,
 figs. 113, 125, 130
 Agula, fig. 142
 Aħmad b.İbrahim al Gazi,
see also Aħmad Grañ
 Aħmad Grañ (1506–1543),
see also Aħmad
 b.İbrahim al Gazi
 Aksum
 Aksum coinage
 anonymous, figs. 27, 167
 Armaħ, figs. 28–29,
 31a–b, 32, 171
 Ezana, fig. 33
 Gersem, fig. 30
 Hataz, fig. 166
 Joel, figs. 168–170
 ZA-YA'ABIYO LA
 MADHEN NEGUS,
 fig. 172
 Aksum crosses
 hand cross
 long staff topped with
 cross
 representation of crosses
 as physical objects
 type I (patée)
 form (Ia)
 form (Ib)
 form (Ic)
 form (Id)
 type II (Greek)
 type III (Latin)
 type IV (patée)
 Aksum pottery
 Aksum Region
 Aksum Šeyon Maryam, *see*
also Aksum; Miracles of
 Mary, fig. 161
 Ala'əsa Mika'el
 crosses, fig. 135,
 triptych, fig. 146
 Ali II, *Ras*
 Almeida, Manoel de
 Altar, *see also* mänbärä
tabot
 Alula 3ngada, *Ras*
 (ca. 1849–1897)
 Alvares, Francisco
 Amba Alaği crosses,
 fig. 141
 Amba Dära Mika'el
 Ambassäl Psalter, figs. 60,
 65, 95, 97
 Amdä Šayon, *Aše*
 (1314–1344)
 Amhara
 Ananya, Abbot of Däbrä
 Šärabi *gädlä* *Ananya*
anästänña mäsqäl, *see*
also Crosses, liturgy
 (incense)
anästänña mäsqäl
 Ancient of Days, fig. 72,
see also Däbrä Hayq
 Andrew, the Apostle,
 fig. 65, *see also*
 Ambasäl Psalter
 Anfray, Francis
 Angels, *see also* Gännätä
 Maryam
 Angoläla
 Angot
 Waša Mika'el
 Ankh, *see also* Crux ansata
 Ankobär
 Anoryos the Elder, *Abunä*,
 fig. 67
 Anṭalo
 Anthony of the Desert, St
 fig. 60, *see also*
 Ambassäl Psalter; Red
 Sea Monastery
 Anzani, Arturo
 Apostles, *see also* Twelve
 Apostles
 Arädor, *see also* Nails of
 the Cross
 Arägawi, *Abunä*, *see also*
 Za-Mika'el
 Ar'aya Šəllase Yohannəs
 (1870–1888)
 Arba'ətu ənsəsa *see also*
 Kiyazba K'aqa Arba'ətu
 3nsəsa
 Archangels
 Ark of the Covenant, *see*
also *tabot*, *šəllat*

- Armaḥ, King of Aksum,
see also Aksum coinage
Armenians
Aron's staff, see also *bātrā aron*
Ašāngi, Lake, see also
Lake Ašāngi
Aṣbi-Dāra, see also Agobo
Čārḡos
Aṣbo, see also Dābrā
Libanos
Asfa Wāsān, *Mūr'ad azmač*
of Šāwa (1775–1808)
Asmāra
Athanasius, St, fig. 66, see
also Sāwne Maryam,
Gospels
Atronsā Maryam
Awaš River
Azais, François
- B**
Bādančo, see also
Zāmaryam; 3nnarya
Bādeke
Bā'adā Maryam, *Aṣe*
(1468–1478)
bāg'āna
Bāgemdār
bāg'arond
Baghdad
baḡar nāgaš
Baḡāra Maryam, Haramat
Bākaffa, *Aṣe* (1720–1730)
bāla kuk mawč'a mäsqāl,
see also ear spoon cross
Bali
Balicka-Witakowska, Ewa
banner surmounted by cross
Bantalem Tadesse
Barbara, St, fig. 41, see
also Mākinā Mādḡane
'Alām, wall paintings
Bargello, see also Florence
Barradas, Manoel
Bartnicki, Andrzej
Bartoli, Antonio
Basil, St, fig. 66, see also
Sāwne Maryam
Basset, René
Bātārgela Maryam, 15th
century
bātrā aron, see also Aron's
staff
Bātrā Giyorgis, *Ṣṣṣāge*
bātra mäsqāl
Bē'ase Sālam, *Abunā*, see
- also Yāddābā Maryam
Behold the Lamb, see also
Nāwa Bāg'u
Behold the Lamb of God,
see also Crosses, *qār'nā*
bāg'ā
Bent, James Theodore
Benzing, Brigitta
Bērbor Maryam *Laḡā*
Maryam, fig. 81a–b
Berlin, Staatsbibliothek
Preußischer Kulturbesitz
Psalter, fig. 132
Bernatz, Johann
Bērru Goṣu, *Dāgḡazmač*
betā ləḡam
bātrā mäsqāl, see also
crosses, iron
Beylot, Robert
Biasio, Elisabeth
Biblioteca Apostolica
Vaticana
Bibliothèque Nationale,
Paris
Bidder, Irmgard
Bilbila Čārḡos crosses,
fig. 186
Bishop (false), fig. 119
blacksmiths
Blue Nile
Book of Light, see also
Māḡafā bərhan
Brancaleon, Nicolò, fig. 78
Brass, see also Crosses,
material, symbolic
significance, technique
Brévédent, François-Xavier
British Institute in Eastern
Africa
British Military Expedition,
1868
Bronze, see also Crosses,
material, symbolic
significance, technique
Bruce, James
Bureau, Jacques
Buxton, David
Byzantine Crosses
enkoplions
iconography
reliquary
- C**
Cairo
Čālāqot Šəllase crosses,
fig. 154
Calvary Cross, see also

- Cross of the Crucifixion
Caquot, André
Čārḡos, see also Ora
Mäsqāl
Catrage
Čenča
Chambard, Roger
Cherubs, fig. 196
Chihab-el-Din Aḡmad 'Abd
el-Qader
Christ, fig. 92a–b
Christ Crowned with
thorns
Christ in Majesty
Crucifixion, fig. 84
Entry into Jerusalem
Resurrection
teaching the Apostles
Transfiguration, fig. 82
with Twelve Apostles,
fig. 185
Church cantor, see also
dābtāra
Churches, depiction of figs.
159–162, see also Ora
Mäsqāl Čārḡos; Miracles
of Mary
Clemens, VII, Pope
Cloth for covering crosses,
figs. 10–12
Cohen, Marcel
Combes, Edmond
Constantine the Great,
Emperor
Contenson, Henri de
Conti Rossini, Carlo
Copper, see also Cross,
symbolic significance;
Crosses, technique
Coptic
bas-reliefs
coloured drawings
liturgical books
liturgical fans
ostrich eggs
patriarchs
staffs surmounted by
crosses
see also Crosses
Copts (Egypt), see also
Tattoo
Cordia africana
Cordiero, Pietro
Covenant of Mercy,
fig. 126
Cretan iconography
Cross

- Fəre Kahn, *Abunā*,
fig. 164
Lalibāla, King
Nāwa bāg'u
owned by Arāgawī,
Abunā
Sālama, *Abba*
sign of the cross, see also
Tattoo
supplication of the,
see also Crucifix;
Crucifixion Cross;
qār'anyo mäsqāl; True
Cross
Tomas, *Abunā*, fig. 18
Crosses
affixed on crowns, see
also Crowns
bas-reliefs, figs. 17, 25,
45–46
churches, see also
Churches depiction of
coming from Heaven
depictions of
donors, see also Donors
of crosses
engravings on,
figs. 61–63a–b, 80a–b,
82–85, 88, 92a–b, 93,
126–129, 182, 185, 203
figurative
finials
handles of
inscriptions on
long
staffs, see also Staffs
umbrellas, see also
Umbrellas
with cross at the base
with square base
without a base
material
brass
copper
gold
grass
iron
leather
made by, see also Makers
of crosses
medium for miracles, see
also Miracles
plastic
silver
wood
ornamental patterns
bird
- "Brick Arch" setting
circles
crosses
dolphin
ear of wheat setting
fish
fretwork
holes
human face
latticework
leaves
relief, in
shaft
"sieve", fig. 181
sign of the cross
snakes
squares
strapwork
tattoo
tree
zig-zag
style
bottonée, see also
botonny
Byzantine
cercellée, see also
sarcelly
circular
Coptic
"Crutch cross"
diamond-shaped
"Ethiopian" (patée)
first version
fleurée, see also fleury
fleury
Gondār
Greek
"Hawarya"
Horn of the Lamb, see
also *qār'nā bāg'ā*
intricate-edged
Jerusalem
Lalibāla
Latin
"Longinos"
Maltese
Moline
Nubian
open
patée
patée fitchée
patée formée
patée with short side
arms
qār'nā bāg'ā (Horn of the
Lamb, see also Horn of the
Lamb of God, Ram),
figs. 13, 101
quatrefoil frame
sarcelly
second version
short armed
straight arms with gently
flared ends curved out
Zag'e
symbolic significance,
figs. 17, 25, 45–46,
81a–b
Adam's tomb
Ark of the Covenant
Christ's blood
copper
cross on top of churches
dolphin
eternity of Divine Rule
fertility
four directions of the
earth
gold
heavens and earth
Holy Spirit
Horn of the Lamb of God
see also *qār'nā bāg'ā*
Infinity of the Creation
iron
ostrich eggs
rule of Christ
silver
squares and circles
sun and water
symbolic chain of the
cross
tabot
Tree of Life
Tree of Paradise
wood
technique
gilding
granulation
incrustation (glass), figs.
113, 125, 130–131,
inlay, see also Brass,
Gold, Silver, fig. 93
types
affixed on church roofs
apex, see also affixed on
church roofs, figs.
159–162
architectural, apex
hand, figs. 1–9, 12, 18,
21, 27, 29–31a–b, 40–42,
64–76, 78–80a–b, 95, 97,
100–101, 104–113,
115–125, 143, 146–157,

175–177, 181–183, 188, 190, 194, *see also* priests liturgy, figs. 5, 9, 110–113, 121–125, 147–148, 152–153, 191–193, 198–202 liturgy (blessing) liturgy (dance), fig. 8 liturgy (incense), figs. 6–7 manual, *see also* hand neck, figs. 22, 24, 37, 57–59, 103, 133–141, 143–144 pectoral, figs. 23, 60–63a–b, 102, 142, 144–145 post-Aksumite priest's (and monk's) figs. 1–4, 9, 12, 18, 21, 44, 64–73, 75–80a–b, 104–109, 116–120, 143, 146, 149–151, 175–176 procession-hand processional (blessing), figs. 9–13, 16, 26, 38–39, 45–54, 56, 82–93, 114, 126–131, 154–158, 164, 178, 180, 195–196, 203–204

use of crosses
baptism
coronation at Aksum
court ceremony
feasts of the Cross, *see also* Exaltation of the Cross
Finding of the True Cross
incensing, *see also* crosses (liturgy)
kissing of liturgy
ordination, monks
ordination, priests
peace negotiations
prayers
processions
prophylactic and curatif
swearing on
visits by dignitaries

Crucifix, fig. 165
Crucifixion Cross, *see also* True Cross
Crux ansata
Cyriacus, St, fig. 175, *see also* Gännätä Maryam, wall paintings; Waša

Mika'el, wall paintings
Cyril, St, fig. 66, *see also* Säwne Maryam, Gospels

D
Däbrä Abbay staff, fig. 35
Däbrä Abrāntant, fig. 13
Däbrä Asa crosses, fig. 53
wall paintings, figs. 102, 106–107
Däbrä Ašbo, *see also* Däbrä Libanos
Däbrä Bānkol, crosses, figs. 16, 123, 200
gädlä Abunä Mādhaninā 3gzi', fig. 9, *see also* Mādhaninā 3gzi'
Däbrä Bäsrat, *see also* Zena Marqos
Däbrä Bərhan crosses, fig. 197
Däbrä Bərhan Šəllase
Däbrä Bizān, *see also* Filāpos, Abba
Däbrä Damo
Däbrä 3stifanoš, *see also* Däbrä Hayq 3stifanos
Däbrä Gännät, *see also* Dəngəlat Maryam; Ruba Wäyni
Däbrä Gärma crosses, figs. 11, 79, 128
Däbrä Gärzen, *see also* Gundä Gunde, Kaswa
Däbrä Gənfal Šəllase crosses, figs. 5, 112, 203
Däbrä Halle Luya
Däbrä Hayq 3stifanos
Four Gospels, fig. 96
Painted strip, fig. 72
Däbrä Libanos, *see also* Ašbo
Däbrä Ma'ar cross, fig. 54
Däbrä Mādhanit crosses, figs. 80a–b, *see also* Abiyä 3gzi'
Däbrä Marqos
Däbrä Maryam zä-Hayda crosses, figs. 18, 143, 191, 202
Täklä Maryam, fig. 143, *see also* Abunä Tomas
Monastery; Fəre Kahn, Abunä; Tomas, Abunä
Däbrä Maṭmaq
Däbrä Nägodgwad
Däbrä Šāḥay, *see also*

Hašbo Iyāsus, Q'əsq'am
Däbrä Šārabi
gädlä Ewostatewos, figs. 75–76
Crucifixes, fig. 165
Gospels, fig. 96
Däbrä Šayon Maryam
cross in taglio, fig. 45
Däbrä Sina Maryam wall paintings, fig. 108
Däbrä Tabor
Däbrä Wārḳ
crosses, fig. 144
Miracles of Mary, fig. 160
däbtāra, *see also* church cantor
Dagä 3stifanos
Dägu Maḥbār Šādqaṇ crosses, fig. 131
Dalbergia melanoxylon, *see also* African Ebony
dāmāra
Dämbäčča Mika'el crosses, fig. 1
Miracles of Mary, fig. 119
Dämbəya
dānat, *see also* Nails of the Cross
Danə'el, Abba, fig. 76, *see also* Däbrä Šārabi, *gädlä* Ewostatewos
Dangla
Daoud Marcos
Däq Island, *see also* Lake Ṭana
däqiqä ʾəstifanos, *see also* 3stifanos
Däqsəyos, Bishop, fig. 119
David, King of Judah, fig. 132, *see also* Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz
Dawit II, Aše, 1380–1413
Dawit III, Aše, 1716–1720
Dawnt, *see also* Yäddəbä Maryam
Däy Giyorgis crosses, fig. 150
Deir Al-Chohada
Demons
Dəngəlat Maryam (Däbrä Gännät) crosses, figs. 88, 147
Dərsanä Gäbrə'el, *see also* Homily of Archangel

Gabriel
Deutsche Aksum-Expedition, *see also* German Aksum Expedition
Devils
Dima Giyorgis crosses, fig. 84
Dioscurus, fig. 66, *see also* Säwne Maryam, Gospels
Dollar, *see also* Maria Theresa dollar
Dolphin, *see also* Crosses, ornamental pattern
Donors of crosses, *see also* Alula, Ras, fig. 203
Bä'ädä Maryam
3stifanos, Abunä, figs. 80a–b
Gugsa, Däggəzmač, fig. 201
Iyasu I
Iyasu II
Käbbädä Mängäša, māmhar, fig. 158
Məntəwwab, Štege
Mika'el Šəḥul, Ras
Säbāne Giyorgis
Säblä Wängel, Štege wife of Löbnä Dəngal
Säblä Wängol, Štege wife of Yohannos I
Wäldä Šəllase, Ras
Wälättä Haymanot
Yohannos I, Aše (1667–1682), *see also* Yohannos IV (1872–1889), figs. 155, 157
Doresse, Jean
Dorze Giyorgis
Dynasty
Solomonic
Zag'e

E
ear spoon cross
Ear-pick, fig. 14
Ebony, *see also* African Ebony, Crosses
ʿədaga Arabi
ʿədaga Hamus
Egypt
əlarjo cross, fig. 16
Eleni, Queen
Elias, Prophet

Ella Gabaz, King of Aksum
Encolpion
3nda Abba Šəḥma crosses, figs. 89–90, 183
3nda Abunä Samu'el, *see also* Däbrä Abay
3nda Abunä Yəm'atā, wall paintings, figs. 3, 73
3nda Čarqos
3nda Iyāsus crosses, fig. 137
3nda Šəllase, *see also* Adwa
3nda Yohannos Kāma
3ndārta
Engravings, *see also* Crosses
3nnarya, *see also* Bādančo zāmāryam
Epiphany
ərfa məsqāl, *see also* eucharistic spoon
3rgibe Ašgədom
Eritrea
3skəndər, Aše (1478–1494)
Esna Desert, *see also* Deir Al-Chohada
3stifanos (ʾəstifa), Abba
3stifanos Abunä, *see also* Donors of Crosses
Ethiopia Imperial
Archaeological Institute
Ethiopian Orthodox
Təwahədo Church
Eucharistic spoon
Evangelists, *see also* Four Evangelists
Ewostatewos, Abuna (ca. 1273–1352), figs. 70, 76, 105, 108, 116–117 *see also* Addis Abāba, IES Museum; Däbrä Šārabi; Däbrä Sina Maryam
Exaltation of the Cross, *see also* Məsqāl
Ezana, King of Aksum, fig. 33
Ezo
3zra (ʾəstifanosite monk)

F
Fälaša
Faras Crosses, depiction of
Fasilädäs, Aše (1632–1667)
Fayum
Fəčče
Fənotä Šälām

Fəre Kahn, Abunä, *see also* Cross, owned by; Däbrä Maryam zä-Hayda
Fəre Maryam, 15th century, missionary
Fəre Šayon, 15th century
Filāpos, Abbot of Ašbo, *see also* Ašbo
Filāpos, Abbot of Däbrä Bizān, fig. 75
Filigree work, *see also* Silversmiths
Finding of the Cross, *see also* Məggabit
Finding of the True Cross, *see also* Məsqāl
Fish, *see also* Crosses ornamentation
Five Wise Virgins, fig. 42, *see also* Mäkinä
Madhane 'Alām
Florence, Bargello Museum
Fly-whisk
Four Evangelists, figs. 92a–b, *see also* Wafa Iyāsus, crosses
Four Living Creatures, *see also* Arba'ətu ʾənsəsa
Frumentius, *see also* Abba Šälāma

G
Gäbrä Krəstos, 15th century, *see also* Makers of crosses
Gäbrä Mənfəs Qəddus, Abunä, figs. 23, 104, *see also* Addis Abāba, IES Museum
Gäbrä Məsqāl, *see also* Lalibāla
Gäbrä Məsqāl, Aše, 6th century
Gäbrä Məsqāl, 15th-century missionary
Gäbra Mika'el, Abba
Gäbrä Sayon, fig. 64, *see also* Addis Abāba, National Library, Gospels
Gäbrə'el, *see also* Gabriel, Archangel
Gabriel, Archangel, *see also* Homily of
gādam
Gälawdewos, Aše (1540–1559)

Gamo, *see also* Čenča
 Gännätä Maryam
 crosses, fig. 85
 wall paintings, figs.
 43–44, 55, 77, 175–176,
 Gäraltä
 Gäräma, *Abba*, 5th–6th
 century, *see also* Däbrä
 Gäräma
gəmgä
 Gəmgabet Kidanä Məhrät
 Miracles of Mary,
 fig. 162
 Gənfal Šəllase, *see also*
 Däbrä Gənfal Šəllase
 George, King of Nabadia
 George, St, fig. 126, 128,
 195–196, 203, *see also*
 Däbrä Gənfal, crosses
 German Aksum
 Expedition, *see also*
 Deutsche Aksum-
 Expedition
 Gersem, King of Aksum,
 fig. 30
 Gerster, Georg
 Gervers, Michael
 Getatchew Haile
 Getesemane crosses,
 fig. 114, *see also* G^oanča
 Valley
 Gayon Gibe River
 Gibe River
 Girma Kidane
 Gišan Maryam, Amba
 Glass, *see also* Crosses,
 technique
 Godlewski, Włodzimierz
 Goğğam
 Gold mines, *see also*
 Crosses, material,
 symbolic significance,
 technique
 Golgotha, *see also* Lalibäla
 Gomo
 Gondär
 Exhibition 1955, *see also*
 Crosses, style; staffs
 surmounted by crosses
 Gospels
 Armenian
 Ethiopian
 Gošu, *Däggazmač*
 Gotara Kidanä Məhrät
 crosses, fig. 152
 Granulation, *see also*
 Crosses, technique

Grass, *see also* Crosses
 Greeks
 Griaule, Marcel
 Guduba Yohannəs, crosses,
 fig. 86
 Gugsä, *Däggazanač*
 Guḥ, *see also* 3nda *Abunä*
 Yəm'atä
 Gundä Gunde
 scriptorium
 style
 Gurage
 Guya Täklä Haymanot,
 crosses, figs. 87, 181,
 192
 G^oanča Valley, *see also*
 Getesemane; Wafa Iyäsus

H
 Habtä Maryam, *Abba*
 (Däbrä Libanos)
 Habtä Maryam, *Abba*
 (Yäddabä Maryam)
 Hafiz Daoud, *see also*
 Marcos Daoud
Hagenia abyssinica, *see*
 also kosso
 Haggärä Sälam
 Hämälmal Wärq, *3tege*
 Hammerschmidt, Ernst
 Haramat, *see also* Bahəra
 Maryam; Maryam
 Dəngəlat
 Haräyo, St, fig. 99, *see*
 also Hilary(?)
 Harrär
 Harris, William
 Hašbo Iyäsus crosses,
 fig. 122, *see also* Däbrä
 Šəhay; Aksum Region
Häšurä mäsqäl, *see also*
 Rampart of the Cross
 Hataz, King of Aksum,
 fig. 166, *see also* Aksum
 coinage
Hawarya mäsqäl, *see also*
 Crosses
 Hawəlti
 Haylä Mälakot, *Nəguš* of
 Šäwa (1847–1855)
 Haylä Maryam (Däbrä
 Gənfal), *Abba*
 Haylä Maryam, *Mämhər*,
 fig. 150, *see also* Däy
 Giyorgis
 Haylä Maryam Gäbre
 Haylä Šəllase, *Aše*

(1930–1974)
 Hayq 3stifanos
 Hayq, Lake, *see also* Lake
 Hayq
 Hecht, Dorothea
 Heldman, Marilyn
 Helena, Queen, St
 Her-Amlak, *see also* Waša
 Mika'el, wall paintings
 Heraclius (610–641),
 Byzantine Emperor
 Hermitage Museum
 (St Petersburg)
 Hilary(?), *see also* Haräyo
 History of the Galla, *see*
 also zenahu galla
 Holy Cross Church of, *see*
 also Crucifixion;
 Crucifixion Cross
 Holy Land
 Holy Sepulchre, *see also*
 Tomb of Christ
 Holy Trinity, figs. 127a–b,
 203–204, *see also* Adwa
 Šəllase; Čäläqot Šəllase;
 Däbrä Gənfal Šəllase
 Homily of Archangel
 Gabriel, *see also*
 Dərsanä Gäbra'el
 Hor, *Abba*
 Horn of the Lamb, *see also*
 Crosses; qärnä bəg'ə
 Horn of the Lamb of God,
 see also Crosses,
 symbolic significance,
 qärnä bəg'ə
Hoša'əna
 Hymns to the Cross
 Coptic, *see also*
 "Stauros-Text"
 Ethiopian, *see also*
 Häšurä mäsqäl

I
 Ildefons, *see also* Däqsəyos
 Ilg, Alfred
 Incrustation, *see also*
 Crosses, technique
 Inlay, *see also* Crosses,
 inlay
 Institute of Ethiopian
 Studies, Addis Abäba
 Iron mining, *see also*
 Crosses, material;
 technique; symbolic
 significance
 Isaac, Old Testament

Patriarch
 Isayas, Abbot of Gundä
 Gunde
 Isenberg, Karl Wilhelm,
 see also Krapf, Johann
 Ludwig
 Israel, Kingdom of
 Iyasu I, *Aše* (1682–1706)
 Iyasu II, *Aše* (1730–1755),
 fig. 127b
 Iyasu of Gar Šəllase, *Abba*
 Iyäsus Mo'a, *Abunä*
 (d. 1292), fig. 94, *see*
 also Däbrä Hayq
 3stifanos

J
 Jacob, Old Testament
 Patriarch
 James the Apostle, fig. 97,
 see also Ambassäl,
 Psalter
 Jeremiah, Prophet
 Jesus Christ, *see also*
 Christ
 Jews
 Joel, King of Aksum, figs.
 168–170, *see also* Aksum
 coinage
 John the Apostle, fig. 97,
 see also Ambassäl,
 Psalter
 John the Baptist, fig. 72,
 see also Däbrä Hayq
 3stifanos, painted strip
 John Chrysostom, St,
 fig. 66, *see also* Säwne
 Maryam, Gospels
 John III, King of Portugal
 Johnson, Charles
 Joshua of Old Testament
 Judas the Apostle
 Juel-Jensen, Bent
 collection, figs. 27–33,
 67, 166–172
 Julian the Apostate, fig. 55,
 see also Gännätä
 Maryam

K
 Käbbädä Mängäša, Head of
 the Church, *see also* May
 Aläqti; Makers of crosses
 Kämä
 Kane, Thomas L.
 Kaša, *Raq-mäsära*
 Kaša Mərča, *Däggazmač*,

see also Yohannəs IV,
Aše
 Kaswa, *see also* Gundä
 Gunde
 Kəflä Giyorgis, 16th
 century-commissionary
 Kidanä Məhrät, *see also*
 Covenant of Mercy
 Kidanä Məhrät Church, *see*
 also May Anbäsa, May
 Aläqti
 Kirakos, Bishop of
 Jerusalem
 Kirki, *see also* George,
 King of Nabadia
 Kiyazba K^oaqa, fig. 134
 Kiyazba K^oaqa Arba'otu
 3nsəsa crosses, figs. 8,
 194
 Konalä Däbrähayl
 crosses, fig. 110
 staffs surmounted by
 crosses, figs. 187a–b
 Korabiewicz, Waclaw
 kosso, *see also* Hagenia
 abyssinica
 Krapf, Johann Ludwig
 Krəstos Täsfanä, Abbot of
 Däbrä Hayq, fig. 64, *see*
 also Addis Abäba,
 National Library; Däbrä
 Hayq 3stifanos
kufar, *see also* cloth for
 covering crosses
kuk mawča, *see also* ear-
 pick
 Kur, Stanislaw
 Kur'atä rə'əsu, fig. 129, *see*
 also Striking of His Head
 K^oəleşewon, "son of the
 king", figs. 40, 77, *see*
 also Gännätä Maryam,
 wall paintings; Mäkinä
 Mädhane 'Aläm, wall
 paintings

L
 Laḥä Maryam
 Lake Ašangi
 Lake Hayq
 Lake Tana Däq Island
 Lalibäla
 Betä Gäbra'el crosses
 Betä Giyorgis crosses
 Betä Golgotha crosses
 Betä Mädhane 'Aläm
 crosses

Betä Maryam crosses
 Betä Mika'el crosses
 Market, fig. 138, *see also*
 Roha
 Lalibäla, *Aše* (12th–13th
 century), *see also* Cross,
 owned by; Gäbrä Mäsqał
 Lasta
 Lauds of the Cross, *see*
 also Wəddase wəqənay
 lāmäsqał
 Lazzarini, Vittorio
 Leather, *see also* Crosses,
 material
 Ləbnä Dəngəl, *Aše*
 (1508–1540)
 Leclant, Jean
 Lefèbvre, Théophile
 Lepage, Claude
 Lifchitz, Déborah
L'illustration
Liqä mäsəmməran
 Locusts
 Ludolf, Hiob
 Luke, the Evangelist

M
 Mä'aquddi Yohannəs wall
 paintings, fig. 109
 Macomber, W.F.
 Mädhane 'Aläm, *see also*
 Adwa; Lalibäla; Mäkinä
 Mädhäninä 3gzi', *Abunä*,
 gädlä, fig. 9, *see also*
 Däbrä Bānkol
ma'ətāb, *see also* matāb
Mäggabit, *see also* Finding
 of the True Cross
 Magi, Three
 Magnis, Franz Graf von
 Mähäl Wānz
 Mäh'ari-Amlak, *see also*
 Waša Mika'el, wall
 paintings
 Mäkanä Šəllase
 Makers of Crosses
 Gäbrä Krəstos, 15th
 century
 Käbbädä Mängäša,
 fig. 158
 Mäkinä Mädhane 'Aläm
 wall paintings, figs. 40–42
mäkwännən
 Mälakä Šəge Täsa, *Abba*,
 fig. 149, *see also*
 Wəndəgi Däbrä Šəge
 Maryam

Mälašo 3nda Čärqos
 Mamas, St, fig. 176, *see also* Gännätä Maryam, wall paintings
māmhār
mānbārā tabot
 Mann, C. Griffith
 Manoel, King of Portugal
 Mäqälä
 Museum
 crosses, fig. 141
mäqdäs, *see also* sanctuary
mäqq'amiya, *see also*
 prayer staffs
 Marcos Daoud, *Abunä*
 (d. 1530)
 Mär'ad, *Bäğərond*
 Mär'ad, *Näggadras*
 Märhä Krastos, Abbot of
 Däbrä Libanos *gädlä*
 Maria Theresa dollar
 Mark, the Evangelist
 Märqorewos, *Abba*
 Marqoryos, *see also*
 Mercurius
 Marqos, *Abunä*
 (1694–1716)
 Märtulä Maryam
 Mary (the Virgin), figs.
 119, 127–129, 196
 Virgin of the Passion
 Maryam Dəngəlat
 (Haramat) cross
 Maryam Dəngəlat
 (Tämben) crosses,
 figs. 88, 147
mäsbäkyä mäsqäl
Mäšhafä bərhan, *see also*
 Book of Light
Mäšhafä tefut
Mäsqäl, *see also* Exaltation
 of the Cross
mäsqäl qəddase, *see also*
 Crosses, liturgy
matäb
 Mätära
 Matthew, the Apostle,
 fig. 95, *see also*
 Ambassäl Psalter
 Matthew, the Armenian
 Matthew, Patriarch of
 Alexandria
 May Aläqti Kidanä Məhrat
 crosses, fig. 158, *see also*
 Agamä
 May Anbässa Kidanä
 Məhrät crosses, fig. 156

Məlləhəyžangi
 Men wearing neck crosses
 Mənilək II, *Aše*
 (1889–1913)
Məntəwwab, Štege
 (1706–1773),
 figs. 127a–b, *see also*
 Donors of Crosses
 Mercier, Jacques
 Mercurius, St, fig. 55, *see also*
 Gännätä Maryam,
 wall paintings
 Meroe
 Məşawwa
məşor
məşor mäsqäl
 Michael, the Archangel
 Michael the Astute, *see also*
 Mika'el Səhul
 Michael the Syrian
 Mika'el, *see also* Michael,
 Archangel
 Mika'el the Greek,
 silversmith
 Mika'el Səhul, *Ras*,
 fig. 128, *see also* Däbrä
 Abba Gärima; Donors of
 Crosses
 Minas, *Aše* (1559–1563)
 Miquel, André
 Miracles of Crosses, figs.
 16, 18, 164
 Miracles of Mary, figs.
 119, 160–162
 Monk (unidentified),
 fig. 44, *see also* Gännätä
 Maryam, wall paintings
 Monk on horseback,
 fig. 73, *see also* 3nda
 Abunä Yəm'atä, wall
 paintings
 Moore, Eine
 Morät, *see also* Däy
 Giyorgis; Zena Marqos
 Moses, Patriarch
 Moffa
 Mount of Olives
 Mount Tabor, *see also*
 Christ's Transfiguration
 Mugär
 Muluwärq Kidanä Maryam
 Munro-Hay, Stuart
 Murad Kamil
 Murara, *see also* Solomon,
 Nəguś
 Muse, *Abunä*, fig. 69, *see also*
 Yäddäbä Maryam,

wall paintings
 Muyser, Jacob

N
näggadras
nähas, *see also* Bronze;
 Brass; Crosses, material;
 Crosses, symbolic
 significance
 Nails of the Cross, *see also*
 dānat, adera, rodas, sador
 Na'od, *Aše* (1494–1508)
 Naples
 Narga Šəllase, *see also*
 Zena narga
Nas
 National Library
 Gospels, fig. 64,
 see also Hayq 3stifanos
 National Museum,
 Warszawa
Näwa bäg'u, *see also*
 Behold the Lamb
 Nəhyo Bäkrastos, *see also*
 Waša Mika'el, wall
 paintings
Nəway, Abba
Nəwayä Krastos, *see also*
 Gännätä Maryam, wall
 paintings
 Niccolò da Poggibonsi
 Niccolò di Gagliano
 Nubia (Christian)
 Nubians
 Nuns

O
 Old Dongola Monastery
 Old Testament
Olea africana, *see also*
 Olive tree
 Olive tree
 Ora Mäsqäl Čärqos,
 cross affixed to the
 church roofs, fig. 159
 crosses, fig. 4
 Psalter, figs. 98–99
 staffs surmounted by
 crosses, figs. 34–36,
 173–174
 Oromo
 Ostrich eggs
 Ottoman Empire

P
 Pachomius, St
 Paëz, Gaspar

Palm Sunday
 Paris Exhibition
 2000–2001
 Parkyns, Mansfield
 Paul, Apostle, fig. 85
 Pearce, Nathaniel
 Perczel, Csilla F.
 Peter, Apostle, fig. 85
 Petrides, Pierre
Physiologus
 Piaggia, Carlo
 Plant, Ruth
 Poncet, Charles
 Pool of Probation
 Portugal
 Portuguese in Ethiopia
 Potters
 Powell-Cotton, P.H.G.
 Prayer beads, figs. 142,
 146, *see also* Ala'asa
 Mika'el, triptych
 Prayer staffs, *see also*
 mäqq'amiya
 Prester John of the Indies
 Priests
 Priests of the Heaven,
 figs. 70–71, *see also*
 Yäddäbä Maryam, wall
 paintings
 Prutky, Remedius

Q
qäqwami mäsqäl
qäranyo, *see also* Golgotha
qäranyo mäsqäl, *see also*
 True Cross
qärnä bäg'a, *see also*
 Crosses
qäs gäbäz
 Qasr al-Wizz
qəddäst, inner aisle
 Qirqos, *see also* Cyriacus,
 St
 Qoqolo Yohannäs, crosses,
 fig. 83
 Qorata
qum mäsqäl, *see also*
 Crosses, processional
quwame mäsqäl, *see also*
 Crosses, processional
qwami mäsqäl, *see also*
 Crosses, processional
 Q'əsq'am Palace, *see also*
 Däbrä Šähay

R
 Raineri, Osvaldo

Ram
 Rampart of the Cross, *see also*
 Häsurä mäsqäl
 Ranzano, Pietro
raq-mäsära
 Ratyński, Zbigniew
 Red Sea Monastery of
 St Anthony
 Resurrection, fig. 129
 Retta Alemayehu
 Rochet d'Héricourt,
 Charles-Xavier
rodas, *see also* Nails of the
 Cross
Roha, *see also* Lalibäla
 Rombulo, Pietro
 Rome, Italy
 Romna, *Štege*
 Rosary
 Ruba K'isa Giyorgis
 crosses, figs. 121, 124,
 198
 Ruba Wäyni (Däbrä
 Gännät), crosses, fig. 204
 Rules of the Church, *see also*
 šə'atä betä
 krastyan

S
säbän, *see also* Cloth for
 covering crosses
 Säbäne Giyorgis, *see also*
 Donors of crosses
 Sabea
 Säblä Wängel, *Štege*
 Säblä Wängel wife of
 Labnä Dəngəl
 Säblä Wängel wife of
 Yohannäs I
 Sabuh, an Arab, 15th
 century
sador, *see also* Nails of the
 Cross
 Sahara Desert
 Šahlä Šəllase, *Nəguś* of
 Šäwa (1813–1847),
 fig. 163
 Saint Stephen Monastery,
 see also Däbrä Hayq
 3stifanos
 Sälama, *Abba*, 4th century,
 see also Cross, owned by
 Sälama III, *Abunä*
 (1841–1867)
 Samu'el, fig. 68, *see also*
 Yäddäbä Maryam, wall
 paintings

Samu'el of Däbrä Halle
 Luya, *Abunä*
 Samu'el of Waldäbba,
 Abunä, fig. 9
 Sänäfe
 Sanctuary, *see also* *mäqdäs*
sändäq, fig. 15
 Sankt Augustin,
 Ethnologisches Museum
 Säqoṭa
 Särä'e
 Šäršä Dəngəl, *Aše*
 (1563–1597)
šäwura
 Saviros, St, fig. 66, *see also*
 Säwne Maryam,
 Gospels
 Šäwa
 Säwne Maryam
 crosses, figs. 12, 139
 Gospels, fig. 66
 Sceptre
 Sceptre-cruciger
 Schneider, Roger
sa'al saqlät, *see also* Christ,
 Crucifixion
 Šäge, Aggafari
šəllase, *see also* The Holy
 Trinity
šəllat, *see also* tabot
 Šəm'on
 Sennar
šə'atä betä krastyan, *see also*
 Rules of the Church
 Sergew Hable-Sellase
 Seth
 Šəyon Maryam
šəyyum
 Shah of Iran
 Sheba, Queen of
 Silver, *see also* Crosses,
 material, symbolic
 significance, technique
 Silversmiths
 Šaddis Abäba
 Adwa
 Angoläla
 Anṭalo
 Armenian
 Gondär
 Syria
 Simpson, William
 Šire
 Smyrna
 Solomon, King of Israel
 Solomon, *Nəguś*, 11th–12th
 century, fig. 38, *see also*

- Murara; Zag'e
South Arabia
spears
Spencer, Diana
Staatliches Museum für
Völkerkunde, Munich
Staffs surmounted by
crosses, figs. 28, 32,
34–36, 43, 45–46, 60, 77,
94, 96–99, 132, 173–174,
179, *see also* Konalā
Dābrāhayl; Ora Čārḡos
Staupe, Wilhelm
"Stauros-Text"
"Striking of His head", *see*
also Kur'atā re'esu
Susnəyos, Aṣe
(1607–1632)
Syrians
- T**
Ta'aminā Maryam crosses,
figs. 74, 157
Tā'amrā Maryam, *see also*
Miracles of Mary
Tabor, *see also* Mount
Tabor
tabot
Tādbabā Maryam
Tādla, *see also* Tower of
Pleasure
Tākkāze River
Tāklā Giyorgis, Aṣe
(1779–1800)
Tāklā Haymanot, Abunā
(ca. 1215–1313), figs. 67,
76, 105, 108, 116, 120
Tāklā Haymanot, Nəḡus of
Goḡḡam (1882–1902)
Tāklā Haymanot II, Aṣe
(1769–1777)
Tāklā Maryam, Abbot of
Dābrā Maryam zā-
Ḥayda, fig. 143
Tāmben
Tāmisier, Maurice
Ṭana, *see also* Lake Ṭana
Tāntawəddəm *see also*
Solomon, Nəḡus
Tāsāmma Habtā Mika'el
Gəṣew, Kāṣate Berham
Tātāma Šəllase crosses,
fig. 153
Tattoo
sign of the Cross,
figs. 19–20
sign of the Trinity
- Təḡray
Təḡre
Təḡrəyānnā Maryam, figs.
40, 77, *see also* Gānnātā
Maryam, wall paintings;
Mākinā Madḡane 'Alām,
wall paintings
Telaye Gebremedhin
Temple (Jerusalem)
Tənsay'e Gizaw, Abba
Tewodros, Aṣe
(1854–1868)
Thanks to the Cross, *see*
also Lauds of the Cross
Theodore, St
Theofil, St, fig. 66, *see*
also Sāwne Maryam,
Gospels
Thomas, the Apostle,
fig. 96, *see also* Dābrā
Šārabī, Gospels
Tilahun Paulos,
Kāññazmač
Timothy, St, fig. 98, *see*
also Ora Mäsḡāl Čārḡos,
Psalter
Tomb of Christ
Tower of Pleasure, *see also*
Tādla
Transfiguration of Christ,
see also Tā'aminā
Maryam, crosses
Tree of Life, *see also* Tree
of Paradise
Tree of Paradise, *see also*
Cross, symbolic
significance
Tree of Wisdom, *see also*
Tree of Life
Trinity, *see also* Holy
Trinity
True Cross
finding
legends
supplication
wood (relic) of
see also Cross
Turkish piastre
Twelve Apostles, fig. 106,
185, *see also* Addis
Abāba, IES Museum,
crosses; Dābrā Asa,
crosses
- U**
Umbrella surmounted by
cross, figs. 132, 163

V

- Venice
Virgin of the Passion,
fig. 83, *see also* Mary
(the Virgin)
- W**
Wafa Iyāsus crosses, figs.
92a–b, *see also* Gwāñča
Valley
Wag
Wālāttā Giyorgis, *see also*
Məntəwwab, Štege
Wālāttā Haymanot, wife of
Ras Alula, *see also*
Donors of crosses
Wāldā Šəllase,
Dāḡḡazmač, *see also*
Wāldā Šəllase, Ras
Wāldā Šəllase, Ras, *see*
also Donors of Crosses
Wāldā Tənsay' Gizaw,
Abba
Wāldəbba
Wālisso
Walker, C.H.
Wāllō
Walters Art Museum,
Baltimore, Maryland
wāñfit mäsḡāl,
see also Crosses,
ornamental pattern
Wāñtā Wədom ḡaṣay
Wānza, *see also* Cordia
africana
Warwar, *see also* Lalibāla
Waša Mika'el, wall
paintings
Wāynamā Kidanā Məḡrāt
crosses, fig. 129
Wāyra, *see also* Olea
africana
Wazen, King of Aksum
Wəddase mäsḡāl, *see also*
Praises of the Cross
Wəddase wāḡenay mäsḡāl,
see also Thanks to the
Cross
Wəddase Wāḡənay lā-
mäsḡāl, *see also* Lauds
of the Cross
Wəndəḡi Dābrā Šəḡe
Maryam crosses, fig. 149
Wifāt Šəllase
Women wearing neck
crosses, figs. 19–20,
134–142

- Wood, *see also* Crosses,
symbolic significance;
Crucifixion Cross; True
Cross
Wuḡən Gābrə'el crosses,
fig. 91
Wuḡro Čārḡos Crosses in
bas-relief, fig. 46
Wuḡro Mäsḡāl Krəstos,
crosses in bas-relief,
fig. 17
Wylde, Augustus
- Y**
Yā-Godana Mika'el
crosses, fig. 145
yā-nazarawi mäsḡāl,
(Crucifixion Cross)
yābrāt mäsḡāl, *see also*
Crosses
yāburake mäsḡāl
Yāddəbā Maryam wall
paintings, figs. 68–71
yā'əḡḡ mäsḡāl, *see also*
Crosses, hand
yānčūt mäsḡāl, *see also*
Crosses, material
yāṣan mäsḡāl, *see also*
Crosses, Liturgy
(incense)
Yāḡbə'ā Šayon, Aṣe
(1285–1294)
yangāt mäsḡāl, *see also*
Crosses, neck
yāləbb mäsḡāl, *see also*
Crosses, pectoral
"[yā]māḡq'amiya mäsḡāl
(prayer staff surmounted
by cross)
[yā]māṣor mäsḡāl, *see also*
Crosses, processional
yāmaṭañña mäsḡāl, *see*
also Crosses, liturgy
(incense)
Yaqob Beyene
Yarād, St
Yəḡa
Yəkuno Amlak, Aṣe
(1270–1285)
Yəm'atā, Abunā, *see also*
3nda Abunā Yəm'atā;
Guḡ
Yəṣḡaq, Aṣe (1413–1430)
Yəḡannəs, Abbot of Dābrā
Libanos
Yəḡannəs Armenian
blacksmith
- Yəḡannəs Kāma
Yəḡannəs, Aṣe
(1667–1682)
Yəḡannəs IV, Aṣe
(1872–1889)
Yəḡannəs, Patriarch of
Alexandria
Yəḡanni, Abba, *see also*
Abba Yəḡanni; Dābrā
Asa
- Z**
Zā-Iyāsus, fig. 64, *see also*
Ḥayq 3stifanos, Gospels
Zā-Mika'el, *see also*
Arāḡawi
Zadok, Head priest
Zag'e dynasty
Lalibāla
Murara
Tāntawəddəm
Zāmānā mäsafənt
Zāmaryam, *see also*
Bādančo
Zār'a Ya'əḡob, Aṣe
(1434–1468)
Zena Giyorgis, *see also*
Silversmiths
Zena Marḡos, Abunā
Zena Marḡos, crosses,
fig. 93, *see also* Morāt
Zena narga, *see also* Narga
Šəllase
Zenahu lāḡalla, *see also*
History of the Galla
Zürich, Völkerkundemuseum
m der Universität
Zway Lake